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The writings of Thomas Bailey Aldrich

Thomas Bailey Aldrich

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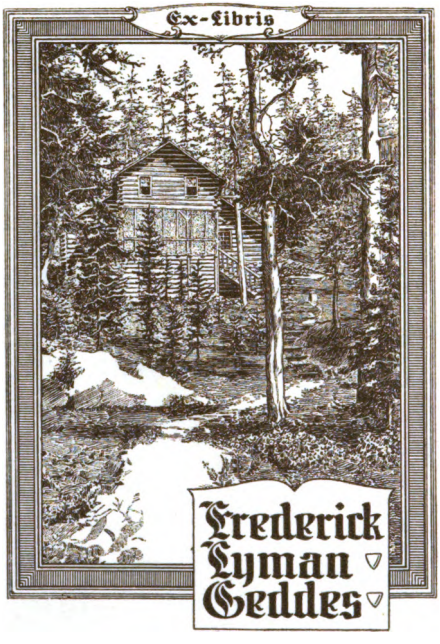

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Ponkapog Edition

THE WRITINGS OF

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

IN NINE VOLUMES

WITH PORTRAITS AND MANY ILLUSTRATIONS

VOLUME I

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Thomas Bailey Aldrich

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THE WRITINGS
OF
THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

POEMS

VOLUME I

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
THE RIVERSIDE PRESS CAMBRIDGE

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

To the poems collected by Mr. Aldrich for the Riverside Edition of his works the publishers have now added "Judith of Bethulîa" and "Longfellow." The former is in part a dramatization of the author's narrative poem "Judith and Holofernes," but though it contains lines and passages from the story, the drama deals with characters, incidents, and situations not to be found in the poem or in the apocryphal episode upon which both pieces were based, and was regarded by its author as essentially a distinct work. The play was produced at the Tremont Theatre, Boston, October 13, 1904, and was published in book form the next month, but certain changes were made in the two scenes constituting Act III before the second edition was printed in 1905. The poem entitled "Longfellow" was written for the Longfellow centennial celebration, and was read at Sanders Theatre, Harvard University, February 27, 1907. It was also read at the funeral of its author less than a month later.

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NOTE

THESE two volumes include all the lyrics and poems that the author desires associated with his name so long as there may be any interest in his verse. It should be stated that the collection embraces several pieces which he would willingly have cancelled had they not passed beyond his control into various anthologies. Here, at least, the pieces in question are correctly printed. Of his strictly juvenile verse, the author has retained nothing with the exception of the poem of Baby Bell, written in his nineteenth year. The poems in the first volume, being for the most part grouped in accordance with their subject, represent both his earlier and later work. In volume second the poems are arranged in nearly the sequence of their publication in book-form.

Boston, 1897.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH was born November 11, 1836, in Portsmouth, N. H., a city which, under the name of "Rivermouth," he has made familiar to thousands who have never seen the old seaport. It was in "The Story of a Bad Boy" that he first, with many vivid and loving touches, depicted its elm-shaded streets, spacious, old-fashioned dwellings, decaying warehouses, and crumbling wharves, haunted by a faint spicy odor, — the ghost of the dead West India trade. In this delightful history, which we have the best authority for regarding as substantially autobiographical, is given as spirited and living a picture of its author's boyhood as could be desired. Taken in infancy to Louisiana, where his father had business interests, he returned to his grandfather's house in Portsmouth to pass his school days, and there, in 1852, when he was preparing to enter Harvard College, he received the news of his father's death in New Orleans. This loss changed his purpose, and he accepted a position in the banking-house of an uncle in New York.

But already the boy's aspirations were literary rather than commercial, and his earliest verses,

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after the manner of their kind, had appeared in the Poets' Corner of a local newspaper. Even during the three years he remained in his uncle's office he became known as a not infrequent contributor to journals and magazines, and in 1855 he definitely connected himself with the "New York Evening Mirror." From 1856 to 1859 he was assistant editor of the "Home Journal," then under the charge of Mr. N. P. Willis, who gave to the work of his youthful associate a kindly appreciation and encouragement that the latter always held in grateful remembrance. In the early part of the Civil War he was for a time attached to Blenker's Division of the Army of the Potomac as a newspaper correspondent.

He brought out several volumes of verse during these years, the earliest, "The Ballad of Baby Bell, and Other Poems," having been issued when its author was but twenty. Always his own severest critic, he was peculiarly merciless in dealing with his juvenile poems; and in an examination of this little book and its immediate successors but few verses will be found that have reappeared in later collections.

In 1865 Mr. Aldrich married, and removed to Boston to take charge of "Every Saturday," a new weekly established by Ticknor & Fields, of which he remained editor until 1874. In the year first named an edition of his poems was brought out by

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the same publishers, in one of their little blue and gold volumes, a guise in which for a season nearly all American poets of repute were presented to the public, and it was no mean distinction for so young an author to appear thus in company with the best writers of the best period of American literature. Several of the poems in this volume, including "Friar Jerome's Beautiful Book," were first printed in the "Atlantic Monthly," to which Mr. Aldrich had been a contributor since 1860.

In 1869 "The Story of a Bad Boy" appeared as a serial in "Our Young Folks," a juvenile magazine published by Ticknor & Fields. To the vitality and truthfulness of this portrait of a healthy, happy, unspoiled boy, enthusiastic readers, old as well as young, have always been eager to testify. The genuine naturalness of the story, its pleasant humor, and its fine literary quality give it a perennial freshness, and have made it popular in many lands remote from its native New England.

Up to this time Mr. Aldrich may be said to have been known only as a poet, but during the succeeding ten years he was to win wide recognition as a story-writer and novelist. It was then that much began to be said and written about the excellence of the American short story, praises which must have been in no small part inspired by the publication of such little masterpieces as "Miss Mehetabel's Son," "A Rivermouth Romance," and

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"Marjorie Daw," — the last in especial, by its potent if elusive charm, gaining an instant popularity, exceptional in its extent and, it may be added, in its enduring quality. "Marjorie Daw" gave name to a collection of stories and sketches published in 1873; and in the same year appeared a new volume of verse, "Cloth of Gold," followed three years later by "Flower and Thorn." "Prudence Palfrey," its author's first novel, was issued in 1874. The others are "The Queen of Sheba" (1877) and "The Stillwater Tragedy" (1880). A later volume of short stories, "Two Bites at a Cherry, and Other Tales," was brought out in 1893, and another, "A Sea Turn, and Other Matters," appeared in 1902. In these works, whether novel, story, or sketch, we find that easy readableness which comes only from infinite pains on the part of the writer, a lucid style, free alike from mannerisms and affectations and with a quite individual charm, naturalness of movement, and, above all, a quiet but pervasive and spontaneous humor, with touches of simple and unforced pathos.

In 1881, as successor to Mr. W. D. Howells, Mr. Aldrich became editor of the "Atlantic Monthly," in which so much of his best work had first appeared, and he held this chair until 1890. In the early years of his Boston residence he had established a country home at Ponkapog, a village whose rural charms are pleasantly touched upon in "Our

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New Neighbors." For two years, during an absence of Mr. Lowell, he had been the tenant of Elmwood. In 1875 he had made a somewhat extensive European tour, destined to be the first of many similar wanderings and sojourns. It was from the earlier vivid impressions of certain places, which use had not yet made over-familiar, that the agreeable travel-sketches collected in "From Ponkapog to Pesth" (1883) were written. Later journeys were of still larger scope, including two visits to Russia, of which traces may be found in his poems. Freedom from his editorial charge brought larger opportunities for travel, and in 1894–95 he made a journey round the world.

Always loyal to his birthplace, in "An Old Town by the Sea" (1893) he gives a picturesque description of the Portsmouth of history and tradition, as well as his own reminiscences of such survivals of its old life as still remained in his boyhood. The latest volumes of poems are "Mercedes" and "Later Lyrics" (1883), "Mercedes" being a play in two acts, genuinely dramatic in form and spirit, which, with Miss Julia Arthur in the title rôle, was given at Palmer's Theatre, New York, in the season of 1895; "Wyndham Towers" (1889), an Elizabethan story in verse, full of the atmosphere of the time, and containing passages of rare beauty, one of which, the song, "Sweetheart, Sigh no More," is as charming a reproduction of the lyric of England's

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lyric age as these latter days are likely to give us; "The Sisters' Tragedy" (1890); "Unguarded Gates" (1895); "Judith and Holofernes" (1896); and "Judith of Bethulia," a tragedy in four acts (1904). The last, Mr. Aldrich's second piece of stage-work, was produced at the Tremont Theatre, Boston, by Miss Nance O'Neil in 1904, and subsequently performed in our principal cities. His last prose volume was "Ponkapog Papers," a collection of short essays and sketches published in 1903.

The degree of Master of Arts was conferred upon Mr. Aldrich by Yale College (1881) and by Harvard University (1896), and that of Doctor of Letters by Yale (1901) and by the University of Pennsylvania (1905).

We may confidently predict that it is as a poet, and especially as a lyric poet, that Mr. Aldrich will be longest remembered. Some of his briefer poems, in which the beauty of the thought is equaled by the exquisite form of the verse which gives it life, lines which once read linger always in the memory, must be among the things which remain. Thoroughly of New England as he was, he had the French feeling for literary form, the French grace and lightness of touch, qualities which have helped to make his *vers de société* easily the best in our literature. Having the true artist's reverence for his craft, he had little tolerance for careless, ill-

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considered work, least of all for any of his own work that he found wanting, and he never allowed popular favor to save such delinquents from suppression.

Mr. Aldrich died at his home on Mt. Vernon Street, Boston, March 19, 1907. The fine poem on Longfellow, which he had just written for the centenary of the poet's birth, was, very appropriately, read at his own funeral.

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FLOWER AND THORN

TO L. A.

I

At Shiraz, in a sultan's garden, stood
A tree whereon a curious apple grew,
One side like honey, and one side like rue.

Thus sweet and bitter is the life of man,
The sultan said, for thus together grow
Bitter and sweet, but wherefore none may know.

Herewith together you have flower and thorn,
Both rose and brier, for thus together grow
Bitter and sweet, but wherefore none may know.

II

Take them and keep them,
Silvery thorn and flower,
Plucked just at random
In the rosy weather —
Snowdrops and pansies,
Sprigs of wayside heather,

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And five-leafed wild-rose
Dead within an hour.

Take them and keep them:
Who can tell? some day, dear,
(Though they be withered,
Flower and thorn and blossom,)
Held for an instant
Up against thy bosom,
They might make December
Seem to thee like May, dear!

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BABY BELL AND OTHER POEMS

BABY BELL

I

Have you not heard the poets tell
How came the dainty Baby Bell
Into this world of ours?
The gates of heaven were left ajar:
With folded hands and dreamy eyes,
Wandering out of Paradise,
She saw this planet, like a star,
Hung in the glistening depths of even —
Its bridges, running to and fro,
O'er which the white-winged Angels go,
Bearing the holy Dead to heaven.
She touched a bridge of flowers — those feet,
So light they did not bend the bells
Of the celestial asphodels,
They fell like dew upon the flowers:
Then all the air grew strangely sweet.
And thus came dainty Baby Bell
Into this world of ours.

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II

She came and brought delicious May;
The swallows built beneath the eaves;
Like sunlight, in and out the leaves
The robins went, the livelong day;
The lily swung its noiseless bell;
And on the porch the slender vine
Held out its cups of fairy wine.
How tenderly the twilights fell!
Oh, earth was full of singing-birds
And opening springtide flowers,
When the dainty Baby Bell
Came to this world of ours.

III

O Baby, dainty Baby Bell,
How fair she grew from day to day!
What woman-nature filled her eyes,
What poetry within them lay —
Those deep and tender twilight eyes,
So full of meaning, pure and bright
As if she yet stood in the light
Of those oped gates of Paradise.
And so we loved her more and more:
Ah, never in our hearts before
Was love so lovely born.
We felt we had a link between

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This real world and that unseen —
The land beyond the morn;
And for the love of those dear eyes,
For love of her whom God led forth,
(The mother's being ceased on earth
When Baby came from Paradise,) —
For love of Him who smote our lives,
And woke the chords of joy and pain,
We said, *Dear Christ!* — our hearts bowed down
Like violets after rain.

IV

And now the orchards, which were white
And pink with blossoms when she came,
Were rich in autumn's mellow prime;
The clustered apples burnt like flame,
The folded chestnut burst its shell,
The grapes hung purpling, range on range:
And time wrought just as rich a change
In little Baby Bell.
Her lissome form more perfect grew,
And in her features we could trace,
In softened curves, her mother's face.
Her angel-nature ripened too:
We thought her lovely when she came,
But she was holy, saintly now . . .
Around her pale angelic brow
We saw a slender ring of flame.

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V

God's hand had taken away the seal
That held the portals of her speech;
And oft she said a few strange words
Whose meaning lay beyond our reach.
She never was a child to us,
We never held her being's key;
We could not teach her holy things
Who was Christ's self in purity.

VI

It came upon us by degrees,
We saw its shadow ere it fell —
The knowledge that our God had sent
His messenger for Baby Bell.
We shuddered with unlanguaged pain,
And all our hopes were changed to fears,
And all our thoughts ran into tears
Like sunshine into rain.
We cried aloud in our belief,
"Oh, smite us gently, gently, God!
Teach us to bend and kiss the rod,
And perfect grow through grief."
Ah! how we loved her, God can tell;
Her heart was folded deep in ours.
Our hearts are broken, Baby Bell!

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VII

At last he came, the messenger,
The messenger from unseen lands:
And what did dainty Baby Bell?
She only crossed her little hands,
She only looked more meek and fair!
We parted back her silken hair,
We wove the roses round her brow —
White buds, the summer's drifted snow —
Wrapt her from head to foot in flowers . . .
And thus went dainty Baby Bell
Out of this world of ours.

PISCATAQUA RIVER

Thou singest by the gleaming isles,
By woods, and fields of corn,
Thou singest, and the sunlight smiles
Upon my birthday morn.

But I within a city, I,
So full of vague unrest,
Would almost give my life to lie
An hour upon thy breast!

To let the wherry listless go,
And, wrapt in dreamy joy,

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Dip, and surge idly to and fro,
Like the red harbor-buoy;

To sit in happy indolence,
To rest upon the oars,
And catch the heavy earthy scents
That blow from summer shores;

To see the rounded sun go down,
And with its parting fires
Light up the windows of the town
And burn the tapering spires;

And then to hear the muffled tolls
From steeples slim and white,
And watch, among the Isles of Shoals,
The Beacon's orange light.

O River! flowing to the main
Through woods, and fields of corn,
Hear thou my longing and my pain
This sunny birthday morn;

And take this song which sorrow shapes
To music like thine own,
And sing it to the cliffs and capes
And crags where I am known!

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PAMPINA

Lying by the summer sea
I had a dream of Italy.

Chalky cliffs and miles of sand,
Dripping reefs and salty caves,
Then the sparkling emerald waves,
Faded; and I seemed to stand,
Myself an old-time Florentine,
In the heart of that fair land.
And in a garden cool and green,
Boccaccio's own enchanted place,
I met Pampina face to face —
A maid so lovely that to see
Her smile was to know Italy.
Her hair was like a coronet
Upon her Grecian forehead set,
Where one gem glistened sunnily
Like Venice, when first seen at sea.
I saw within her violet eyes
The starlight of Italian skies,
And on her brow and breast and hand
The olive of her native land.

And, knowing how in other times
Her lips were rich with Tuscan rhymes
Of love and wine and dance, I spread

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My mantle by an almond-tree,
And "Here, beneath the rose," I said,
"I 'll hear thy Tuscan melody."
I heard a tale that was not told
In those ten dreamy days of old,
When Heaven, for some divine offence,
Smote Florence with the pestilence;
And in that garden's odorous shade
The dames of the Decameron,
With each a loyal lover, strayed,
To laugh and sing, at sorest need,
To lie in the lilies in the sun
With glint of plume and silver brede.
And while she whispers in my ear,
The pleasant Arno murmurs near,
The timid, slim chameleons run
Through twenty colors in the sun;
The breezes blur the fountain's glass,
And wake æolian melodies,
And scatter from the scented trees
The lemon-blossoms on the grass.

The tale? I have forgot the tale —
A Lady all for love forlorn,
A rose tree, and a nightingale
That bruised his bosom on the thorn;
A jar of rubies buried deep,
A glen, a corpse, a child asleep,
A Monk, that was no monk at all,
In the moonlight by a castle-wall.

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Now while the dark-eyed Tuscan wove
The gilded thread of her romance —
Which I have lost by grievous chance —
The one dear woman that I love,
Beside me in our seaside nook,
Closed a white finger in her book,
Half vext that she should read, and weep
For Petrarch, to a man asleep.
And scorning one so tame and cold,
She rose, and wandered down the shore,
Her wind-swept drapery, fold in fold,
Imprisoned by a snowy hand;
And on a bowlder, half in sand,
She stood, and looked at Appledore.

And waking, I beheld her there
Sea-dreaming in the moted air,
A siren lithe and debonair,
With wristlets woven of scarlet weeds,
And strings of lucent amber beads
Of sea-kelp shining in her hair.
And as I thought of dreams, and how
The something in us never sleeps,
But laughs, or sings, or moans, or weeps,
She turned — and on her breast and brow
I saw the tint that seemed not won
From touches of New England sun;
I saw on brow and breast and hand
The olive of a sunnier land.

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She turned — and, lo! within her eyes
There lay the starlight of Italian skies.

Most dreams are dark, beyond the range
Of reason; oft we cannot tell
If they are born of heaven or hell:
But to my thought it seems not strange
That, lying by the summer sea,
With that dark woman watching me,
I slept and dreamed of Italy.

INVOCATION TO SLEEP

I

THERE is a rest for all things. On still nights
There is a folding of a world of wings —
The bees in unknown woods,
The painted dragonflies, and downy broods
In dizzy poplar heights —
Rest for innumerable nameless things,
Rest for the creatures underneath the sea,
And in the earth, and in the starry air.
It comes to heavier sorrow than I bear,
To pain, and want, and crime, and dark despair
And yet comes not to me!

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II

One that has fared a long and toilsome way
And sinks beneath the burden of the day,
O delicate Sleep,
Brings thee a soul that he would have thee keep
A captive in thy shadowy domain
With Puck and Ariel and the happy train
That people dreamland. Give unto his sight
Immortal shapes, and fetch to him again
His Psyche that went out into the night!

III

Thou that dost hold the priceless gift of rest,
Strew lotus leaf and poppy on his breast;
Reach forth thy hand
And lead him to thy castle in the land
All vainly sought —
To those hushed chambers lead him, where the thought
Wanders at will upon enchanted ground,
And never human footfall makes a sound
Along the corridors.

The bell sleeps in the belfry — from its tongue
A drowsy murmur floats into the air
Like thistle-down. There is no bough but seems
Weighted with slumber — slumber everywhere!

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Couched on her leaf, the lily sways and dips;
In the green dusk where joyous birds have sung
Sits Silence with her finger on her lips;
Shy woodland folk and sprites that haunt the streams
Are pillowed now in grottoes cool and deep;
But I in chilling twilight stand and wait
At the portcullis of thy castle gate,
Longing to see the charmèd door of dreams
Turn on its noiseless hinges, delicate Sleep!

THE FLIGHT OF THE GODDESS

A MAN should live in a garret aloof,
And have few friends, and go poorly clad,
With an old hat stopping the chink in the roof,
To keep the Goddess constant and glad.

Of old, when I walked on a rugged way,
And gave much work for but little bread,
The Goddess dwelt with me night and day,
Sat at my table, haunted my bed.

The narrow, mean attic, I see it now!—
Its window o'erlooking the city's tiles,
The sunset's fires, and the clouds of snow,
And the river wandering miles and miles.

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Just one picture hung in the room,
The saddest story that Art can tell —
Dante and Virgil in lurid gloom
Watching the Lovers float through Hell.

Wretched enough was I sometimes,
Pinched, and harassed with vain desires;
But thicker than clover sprung the rhymes
As I dwelt like a sparrow among the spires.

Midnight filled my slumbers with song;
Music haunted my dreams by day.
Now I listen and wait and long,
But the Delphian airs have died away.

I wonder and wonder how it befell:
Suddenly I had friends in crowds;
I bade the house-tops a long farewell;
"Good-by," I cried, "to the stars and clouds!

"But thou, rare soul, thou hast dwelt with me,
Spirit of Poesy! thou divine
Breath of the morning, thou shalt be,
Goddess! for ever and ever mine."

And the woman I loved was now my bride,
And the house I wanted was my own;
I turned to the Goddess satisfied —
But the Goddess had somehow flown.

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Flown, and I fear she will never return;
I am much too sleek and happy for her,
Whose lovers must hunger and waste and burn,
Ere the beautiful heathen heart will stir.

I call — but she does not stoop to my cry;
I wait — but she lingers, and ah! so long!
It was not so in the years gone by,
When she touched my lips with chrism of song.

I swear I will get me a garret again,
And adore, like a Parsee, the sunset's fires,
And lure the Goddess, by vigil and pain,
Up with the sparrows among the spires.

For a man should live in a garret aloof,
And have few friends, and go poorly clad,
With an old hat stopping the chink in the roof,
To keep the Goddess constant and glad.

AN OLD CASTLE

I

The gray arch crumbles,
And totters and tumbles;
The bat has built in the banquet hall;

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In the donjon-keep
Sly mosses creep;
The ivy has scaled the southern wall.
No man-at-arms
Sounds quick alarms
A-top of the cracked martello tower;
The drawbridge-chain
Is broken in twain —
The bridge will neither rise nor lower.
Not any manner
Of broidered banner
Flaunts at a blazoned herald's call.
Lilies float
In the stagnant moat;
And fair they are, and tall.

II

Here, in the old
Forgotten springs,
Was wassail held by queens and kings;
Here at the board
Sat clown and lord,
Maiden fair and lover bold,
Baron fat and minstrel lean,
The prince with his stars,
The knight with his scars,
The priest in his gabardine.

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III

Where is she
Of the fleur-de-lys,
And that true knight who wore her gages?
Where are the glances
That bred wild fancies
In curly heads of my lady's pages?
Where are those
Who, in steel or hose,
Held revel here, and made them gay?
Where is the laughter
That shook the rafter —
Where is the rafter, by the way?
Gone is the roof,
And perched aloof
Is an owl, like a friar of Orders Gray.
(Perhaps 't is the priest
Come back to feast —
He had ever a tooth for capon, he!
But the capon 's cold,
And the steward 's old,
And the butler 's lost the larder-key!)
The doughty lords
Sleep the sleep of swords;
Dead are the dames and damozels;
The King in his crown
Hath laid him down,
And the Jester with his bells.

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IV

All is dead here:
Poppies are red here,
Vines in my lady's chamber grow —
If 't was her chamber
Where they clamber
Up from the poisonous weeds below.
All is dead here,
Joy is fled here;
Let us hence. 'T is the end of all —
The gray arch crumbles,
And totters, and tumbles,
And Silence sits in the banquet hall.

LOST AT SEA

THE face that Carlo Dolci drew
Looks down from out its leafy hood —
The holly berries, gleaming through
The pointed leaves, seem drops of blood.

Above the cornice, round the hearth,
Are evergreens and spruce-tree boughs;
'T is Christmas morning: Christmas mirth
And joyous voices fill the house.

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I pause, and know not what to do;
I feel reproach that I am glad:
Until to-day, no thought of you,
O Comrade! ever made me sad.

But now the thought of your blithe heart,
Your ringing laugh, can give me pain,
Knowing that we are worlds apart,
Not knowing we shall meet again.

For all is dark that lies in store:
Though they may preach, the brotherhood,
We know just this, and nothing more,
That we are dust, and God is good.

What life begins when death makes end?
Sleek gownsmen, is 't so very clear?
How fares it with us? — O my Friend,
I only know you are not here!

That I am in a warm, light room,
With life and love to comfort me,
While you are drifting through the gloom,
Beneath the sea, beneath the sea!

O wild green waves that lash the sands
Of Santiago and beyond,
Lift him, I pray, with gentle hands,
And bear him on — true heart and fond!

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To some still grotto far below
The washings of the warm Gulf Stream
Bear him, and let the winds that blow
About the world not break his dream!

—I smooth my brow. Upon the stair
I hear my children shout in glee,
With sparkling eyes and floating hair,
Bringing a Christmas wreath for me.

Their joy, like sunshine deep and broad,
Falls on my heart, and makes me glad:
I think the face of our dear Lord
Looks down on them, and seems not sad.

THE QUEEN'S RIDE

AN INVITATION

'T is that fair time of year,
When stately Guinevere,
In her sea-green robe and hood,
Went a-riding through the wood.

And as the Queen did ride,
Sir Launcelot at her side
Laughed and chatted, bending over,
Half her friend and all her lover.

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And as they rode along,
The throstle gave them song,
And the buds peeped through the grass
To see youth and beauty pass.

And on, through deathless time,
These lovers in their prime
(Two fairy ghosts together!)
Ride, with sea-green robe, and feather!

And so we two will ride,
At your pleasure, side by side,
Laugh and chat; I bending over,
Half your friend, and all your lover.

But if you like not this,
And take my love amiss,
Then I 'll ride unto the end,
Half your lover, all your friend.

So, come which way you will.
Valley, upland, plain, and hill
Wait your coming. For one day
Loose the bridle, and away!

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DIRGE

Let us keep him warm,
Stir the dying fire:
Upon his tired arm
Slumbers young Desire.

Soon, ah, very soon
We too shall not know
Either sun or moon,
Either grass or snow.

Others in our place
Come to laugh and weep,
Win or lose the race,
And to fall asleep.

Let us keep him warm,
Stir the dying fire:
Upon his tired arm
Slumbers young Desire.

What does all avail —
Love, or power, or gold?
Life is like a tale
Ended ere 't is told.

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Much is left unsaid,
Much is said in vain —
Shall the broken thread
Be taken up again?

Let us keep him warm,
Stir the dying fire:
Upon his tired arm
Slumbers young Desire.

Kisses one or two
On his eyelids set,
That, when all is through,
He may not forget.

He has far to go —
Is it East or West?
Whither? Who may know!
Let him take his rest.

Wind, and snow, and sleet —
So the long night dies.
Draw the winding-sheet,
Cover up his eyes.

Let us keep him warm,
Stir the dying fire:
Upon his tired arm
Slumbers young Desire.

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ON LYNN TERRACE

ALL day to watch the blue wave curl and break,
All night to hear it plunging on the shore —
In this sea-dream such draughts of life I take,
I cannot ask for more.

Behind me lie the idle life and vain,
The task unfinished, and the weary hours;
That long wave softly bears me back to Spain
And the Alhambra's towers!

Once more I halt in Andalusian Pass,
To list the mule-bells jingling on the height;
Below, against the dull esparto grass,
The almonds glimmer white.

Huge gateways, wrinkled, with rich grays and browns,
Invite my fancy, and I wander through
The gable-shadowed, zigzag streets of towns
The world's first sailors knew.

Or, if I will, from out this thin sea-haze
Low-lying cliffs of lovely Calais rise;
Or yonder, with the pomp of olden days,
Venice salutes my eyes.

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Or some gaunt castle lures me up its stair;
I see, far off, the red-tiled hamlets shine,
And catch, through slits of windows here and there,
Blue glimpses of the Rhine.

Again I pass Norwegian fjord and fell,
And through bleak wastes to where the sunset's fires
Light up the white-walled Russian citadel,
The Kremlin's domes and spires.

And now I linger in green English lanes,
By garden-plots of rose and heliotrope;
And now I face the sudden pelting rains
On some lone Alpine slope.

Now at Tangier, among the packed bazaars,
I saunter, and the merchants at the doors
Smile, and entice me: here are jewels like stars,
And curved knives of the Moors;

Cloths of Damascus, strings of amber dates;
What would Howadji — silver, gold, or stone?
Prone on the sun-scorched plain outside the gates
The camels make their moan.

All this is mine, as I lie dreaming here,
High on the windy terrace, day by day;
And mine the children's laughter, sweet and clear,
Ringing across the bay.

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For me the clouds; the ships sail by for me;
For me the petulant sea-gull takes its flight;
And mine the tender moonrise on the sea,
And hollow caves of night.

SEADRIFT

See where she stands, on the wet sea-sands,
Looking across the water:
Wild is the night, but wilder still
The face of the fisher's daughter.

What does she there, in the lightning's glare,
What does she there, I wonder?
What dread demon drags her forth
In the night and wind and thunder?

Is it the ghost that haunts this coast? —
The cruel waves mount higher,
And the beacon pierces the stormy dark
With its javelin of fire.

Beyond the light of the beacon bright
A merchantman is tacking;
The hoarse wind whistling through the shrouds,
And the brittle topmasts cracking.

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The sea it moans over dead men's bones,
The sea turns white in anger;
The curlews sweep through the resonant air
With a warning cry of danger.

The star-fish clings to the sea-weed's rings
In a vague, dumb sense of peril;
And the spray, with its phantom-fingers, grasps
At the mullein dry and sterile.

Oh, who is she that stands by the sea,
In the lightning's glare, undaunted? —
Seems this now like the coast of hell
By one white spirit haunted!

The night drags by; and the breakers die
Along the ragged ledges;
The robin stirs in his drenchèd nest,
The wild-rose droops on the hedges.

In shimmering lines, through the dripping pines,
The stealthy morn advances;
And the heavy sea-fog straggles back
Before those bristling lances.

Still she stands on the wet sea-sands;
The morning breaks above her,
And the corpse of a sailor gleams on the rocks —
What if it were her lover?

Digitized by Google

THE PIAZZA OF ST. MARK AT MIDNIGHT

HUSHED is the music, hushed the hum of voices;
Gone is the crowd of dusky promenaders,
Slender-waisted, almond-eyed Venetians,
Princes and paupers. Not a single footfall
Sounds in the arches of the Procuratie.
One after one, like sparks in cindered paper,
Faded the lights out in the goldsmiths' windows.
Drenched with the moonlight lies the still Piazza.

Fair as the palace builded for Aladdin,
Yonder St. Mark uplifts its sculptured splendor —
Intricate fretwork, Byzantine mosaic,
Color on color, column upon column,
Barbaric, wonderful, a thing to kneel to!
Over the portal stand the four gilt horses,
Gilt hoof in air, and wide distended nostril,
Fiery, untamed, as in the days of Nero.
Skyward, a cloud of domes and spires and crosses;
Earthward, black shadows flung from jutting stone-
work.
High over all the slender Campanile
Quivers, and seems a falling shaft of silver.

Hushed is the music, hushed the hum of voices.
Listen — from cornice and fantastic gargoyle,

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Now and again the moan of dove or pigeon,
Fairily faint, floats off into the moonlight.
This, and the murmur of the Adriatic,
Lazily restless, lapping the mossed marble,
Staircase or buttress, scarcely break the stillness.
Deeper each moment seems to grow the silence,
Denser the moonlight in the still Piazza.
Hark! on the Tower above the ancient gateway,
The twin bronze Vulcans, with their ponderous hammers,
Hammer the midnight on their brazen bell there!

THE METEMPSYCHOSIS

The thing I am, and not the thing Man is,
Fills my deep dreaming. Let him moan and die;
I know my own creation was divine.
I brood on all the shapes I must attain
Before I reach the Perfect, which is God,
And dream my dream, and let the rabble go;
For I am of the mountains and the sea,
The deserts, and the caverns in the earth,
The catacombs and fragments of old worlds.
I was a spirit on the mountain-tops,
A perfume in the valleys, a simoom
On arid deserts, a nomadic wind
Roaming the universe, a tireless voice.

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I was ere Romulus and Remus were;
I was ere Nineveh and Babylon;
I was, and am, and evermore shall be,
Progressing, never reaching to the end.
A hundred years I trembled in the grass,
The delicate trefoil that muffled warm
A slope on Ida; for a hundred years
Moved in the purple gyre of those dark flowers
The Grecian women strew upon the dead.
Under the earth, in fragrant glooms, I dwelt;
Then in the veins and sinews of a pine
On a lone isle, where, from the Cyclades,
A mighty wind, like a leviathan,
Ploughed through the brine, and from those solitudes
Sent Silence, frightened. To and fro I swayed,
Drawing the sunshine from the stooping clouds.
Suns came and went, and many a mystic moon,
Orbing and waning, and fierce meteors,
Leaving their lurid ghosts to haunt the night.
I heard loud voices by the sounding shore,
The stormy sea-gods, and from fluted conchs
Wild music, and strange shadows floated by,
Some moaning and some singing. So the years
Clustered about me, till the hand of God
Let down the lightning from a sultry sky,
Splintered the pine and split the iron rock;
And from my odorous prison-house a bird,
I in its bosom, darted; so we fled,

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Turning the brittle edge of one high wave,
Island and tree and sea-gods left behind!
Free as the air from zone to zone I flew,
Far from the tumult to the quiet gates
Of daybreak; and beneath me I beheld
Vineyards, and rivers that like silver threads
Ran through the green and gold of pasture-lands,
And here and there a convent on a hill,
And here and there a city in a plain;
I saw huge navies battling with a storm
By hidden reefs along the desolate coasts,
And lazy merchantmen, that crawled, like flies,
Over the blue enamel of the sea
To India or the icy Labradors.
A century was as a single day.
What is a day to an immortal soul?
A breath, no more. And yet I hold one hour
Beyond all price — that hour when from the sky
I circled near and nearer to the earth,
Nearer and nearer, till I brushed my wings
Against the pointed chestnuts, where a stream,
That foamed and chattered over pebbly shoals,
Fled through the briony, and with a shout
Leapt headlong down a precipice; and there,
Gathering wild-flowers in the cool ravine,
Wandered a woman more divinely shaped
Than any of the creatures of the air,
Or river-goddesses, or restless shades
Of noble matrons marvellous in their time

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For beauty and great suffering; and I sung,
I charmed her thought, I gave her dreams, and then
Down from the dewy atmosphere I stole
And nestled in her bosom. There I slept
From moon to moon, while in her eyes a thought
Grew sweet and sweeter, deepening like dawn —
A mystical forewarning! When the stream,
Breaking through leafless brambles and dead leaves,
Piped shriller treble, and from chestnut boughs
The fruit dropt noiseless through the autumn night,
I gave a quick, low cry, as infants do:
We weep when we are born, not when we die!
So was it destined; and thus came I here,
To walk the earth and wear the form of Man,
To suffer bravely as becomes my state,
One step, one grade, one cycle nearer God.
And knowing these things, can I stoop to fret,
And lie, and haggle in the market-place,
Give dross for dross, or everything for naught?
No! let me sit above the crowd, and sing,
Waiting with hope for that miraculous change
Which seems like sleep; and though I waiting starve,
I cannot kiss the idols that are set
By every gate, in every street and park;
I cannot fawn, I cannot soil my soul;
For I am of the mountains and the sea,
The deserts, and the caverns in the earth,
The catacombs and fragments of old worlds.

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BAYARD TAYLOR

In other years — lost youth's enchanted years,
Seen now, and evermore, through blinding tears
And empty longing for what may not be —
The Desert gave him back to us; the Sea
Yielded him up; the icy Norland strand
Lured him not long, nor that soft German air
He loved could keep him. Ever his own land
Fettered his heart and brought him back again.
What sounds are these of farewell and despair
Borne on the winds across the wintry main!
What unknown way is this that he has gone,
Our Bayard, in such silence and alone?
What dark new quest has tempted him once more
To leave us? Vainly, standing by the shore,
We strain our eyes. But patience! When the soft
Spring gales are blowing over Cedarcroft,
Whitening the hawthorn; when the violets bloom
Along the Brandywine, and overhead
The sky is blue as Italy's, he will come . . .
In the wind's whisper, in the swaying pine,
In song of bird and blossoming of vine,
And all fair things he loved ere he was dead!

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INTERLUDES

HESPERIDES

If thy soul, Herrick, dwelt with me,
This is what my songs would be:
Hints of our sea-breezes, blent
With odors from the Orient;
Indian vessels deep with spice;
Star-showers from the Norland ice;
Wine-red jewels that seem to hold
Fire, but only burn with cold;
Antique goblets, strangely wrought,
Filled with the wine of happy thought,
Bridal measures, vain regrets,
Laburnum buds and violets;
Hopeful as the break of day;
Clear as crystal; new as May;
Musical as brooks that run
O'er yellow shallows in the sun;
Soft as the satin fringe that shades
The eyelids of thy Devon maids;
Brief as thy lyrics, Herrick, are,
And polished as the bosom of a star.

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BEFORE THE RAIN

We knew it would rain, for all the morn,
A spirit on slender ropes of mist
Was lowering its golden buckets down
Into the vapory amethyst

Of marshes and swamps and dismal fens —
Scooping the dew that lay in the flowers,
Dipping the jewels out of the sea,
To scatter them over the land in showers.

We knew it would rain, for the poplars showed
The white of their leaves, the amber grain
Shrunk in the wind — and the lightning now
Is tangled in tremulous skeins of rain!

AFTER THE RAIN

The rain has ceased, and in my room
The sunshine pours an airy flood;
And on the church's dizzy vane
The ancient Cross is bathed in blood.

From out the dripping ivy-leaves,
Antiquely carven, gray and high,

Digitized by Google

A dormer, facing westward, looks
Upon the village like an eye.

And now it glimmers in the sun,
A square of gold, a disk, a speck:
And in the belfry sits a Dove
With purple ripples on her neck.

A SNOWFLAKE

ONCE he sang of summer,
Nothing but the summer;
Now he sings of winter,
Of winter bleak and drear:
Just because there 's fallen
A snowflake on his forehead
He must go and fancy
'T is winter all the year!

FROST-WORK

THESE winter nights, against my window-pane
Nature with busy pencil draws designs
Of ferns and blossoms and fine spray of pines,
Oak-leaf and acorn and fantastic vines,

Digitized by Google

Which she will shape when summer comes again —
Quaint arabesques in argent, flat and cold,
Like curious Chinese etchings. . . . By and by
(I in my leafy garden as of old)
These frosty fantasies shall charm my eye
In azure, damask, emerald, and gold.

THE ONE WHITE ROSE

A SORROWFUL woman said to me,
"Come in and look on our child."
I saw an Angel at shut of day,
And it never spoke — but smiled.

I think of it in the city's streets,
I dream of it when I rest —
The violet eyes, the waxen hands,
And the one white rose on the breast!

LANDSCAPE

GAUNT shadows stretch along the hill;
Cold clouds drift slowly west;
Soft flocks of vagrant snowflakes fill
The redwing's frozen nest.

Digitized by Google

By sunken reefs the hoarse sea roars;
Above the shelving sands,
Like skeletons the sycamores
Uplift their wasted hands.

The air is full of hints of grief,
Faint voices touched with pain —
The pathos of the falling leaf
And rustling of the rain.

In yonder cottage shines a light,
Far-gleaming like a gem —
Not fairer to the Rabbins' sight
Was star of Bethlehem!

NOCTURNE

Up to her chamber window
A slight wire trellis goes,
And up this Romeo's ladder
Clambers a bold white rose.

I lounge in the ilex shadows,
I see the lady lean,
Unclasping her silken girdle,
The curtain's folds between.

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She smiles on her white-rose lover,
She reaches out her hand
And helps him in at the window —
I see it where I stand!

To her scarlet lip she holds him,
And kisses him many a time —
Ah, me! it was he that won her
Because he dared to climb!

APPRECIATION

To the sea-shell's spiral round
'T is your heart that brings the sound:
The soft sea-murmurs that you hear
Within, are captured from your ear.

You do poets and their song
A grievous wrong,
If your own soul does not bring
To their high imagining
As much beauty as they sing.

Digitized by Google

PALABRAS CARIÑOSAS

(SPANISH AIR)

GOOD-NIGHT! I have to say good-night
To such a host of peerless things!
Good-night unto the slender hand
All queenly with its weight of rings;
Good-night to fond, uplifted eyes,
Good-night to chestnut braids of hair,
Good-night unto the perfect mouth,
And all the sweetness nestled there —
The snowy hand detains me, then
I'll have to say Good-night again!

But there will come a time, my love,
When, if I read our stars aright,
I shall not linger by this porch
With my farewells. Till then, good-night!
You wish the time were now? And I.
You do not blush to wish it so?
You would have blushed yourself to death
To own so much a year ago —
What, both these snowy hands! ah, then
I'll have to say Good-night again!

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APPARITIONS

At noon of night, and at the night's pale end,
Such things have chanced to me
As one, by day, would scarcely tell a friend
For fear of mockery.

Shadows, you say, mirages of the brain!
I know not, faith, not I.
Is it more strange the dead should walk again
Than that the quick should die?

UNSUNG

As sweet as the breath that goes
From the lips of the blown rose,
As weird as the elfin lights
That glimmer of frosty nights,
As wild as the winds that tear
The curled red leaf in the air,
Is the song I have never sung.

In slumber, a hundred times
I have said the mystic rhymes,

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But ere I open my eyes
This ghost of a poem flies;
Of the interfluent strains
Not even a note remains:
I know by my pulses' beat
It was something wild and sweet,
And my heart is deeply stirred
By an unremembered word!

I strive, but I strive in vain,
To recall the lost refrain.
On some miraculous day
Perhaps it will come and stay;
In some unimagined Spring
I may find my voice, and sing
The song I have never sung.

AN UNTIMELY THOUGHT

I WONDER what day of the week,
I wonder what month of the year—
Will it be midnight, or morning,
And who will bend over my bier? . . .

—What a hideous fancy to come
As I wait at the foot of the stair,

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While she gives the last touch to her robe,
Or sets the white rose in her hair.

As the carriage rolls down the dark street
The little wife laughs and makes cheer —
But . . . I wonder what day of the week,
I wonder what month of the year.

ONE WOMAN

Thou listenest to us with unheeding ear;
Alike to thee our censure and our praise:
Thou hearest voices that we may not hear;
Thou livest only in thy yesterdays.

We see thee move, erect and pale and brave;
Soft words are thine, sweet deeds, and gracious will;
Yet thou art dead as any in the grave —
Only thy presence lingers with us still.

With others, joy and sorrow seem to slip
Like light and shade, and laughter kills regret;
But thou — the fugitive tremor of thy lip
Lays bare thy secret — thou canst not forget!

Digitized by Google

REALISM

ROMANCE beside his unstrung lute
Lies stricken mute.
The old-time fire, the antique grace,
You will not find them anywhere.
To-day we breathe a commonplace,
Polemic, scientific air:
We strip Illusion of her veil;
We vivisect the nightingale
To probe the secret of his note.
The Muse in alien ways remote
Goes wandering.

DISCIPLINE

IN the crypt at the foot of the stairs
They lay there, a score of the Dead:
They could hear the priest at his prayers,
And the litany overhead.

They knew when the great crowd stirred
As the Host was lifted on high;
And they smiled in the dark when they heard
Some light-footed nun trip by.

Digitized by Google

Side by side on their shelves
For years and years they lay;
And those who misbehaved themselves
Had their coffin-plates taken away.

Thus is the legend told
In black-letter monkish rhyme,
Explaining those plaques of gold
That vanished from time to time!

DESTINY

THREE roses, wan as moonlight and weighed down
Each with its loveliness as with a crown,
Drooped in a florist's window in a town.

The first a lover bought. It lay at rest,
Like flower on flower, that night, on Beauty's breast.

The second rose, as virginal and fair,
Shrunk in the tangles of a harlot's hair.

The third, a widow, with new grief made wild,
Shut in the icy palm of her dead child.

Digitized by Google

NAMELESS PAIN

In my nostrils the summer wind
Blows the exquisite scent of the rose:
Oh for the golden, golden wind,
Breaking the buds as it goes!
Breaking the buds and bending the grass,
And spilling the scent of the rose.

O wind of the summer morn,
Tearing the petals in twain,
Wafting the fragrant soul
Of the rose through valley and plain,
I would you could tear my heart to-day
And scatter its nameless pain!

HEREDITY

A soldier of the Cromwell stamp,
With sword and psalm-book by his side,
At home alike in church and camp:
Austere he lived, and smileless died.

But she, a creature soft and fine —
From Spain, some say, some say from France;

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Within her veins leapt blood like wine —
She led her Roundhead lord a dance!

In Grantham church they lie asleep;
Just where, the verger may not know.
Strange that two hundred years should keep
The old ancestral fires aglow!

In me these two have met again;
To each my nature owes a part:
To one, the cool and reasoning brain,
To one, the quick, unreasoning heart.

IDENTITY

SOMEWHERE — in desolate wind-swept space —
In Twilight-land — in No-man's-land —
Two hurrying Shapes met face to face,
And bade each other stand.

"And who are you?" cried one a-gape,
Shuddering in the gloaming light.
"I know not," said the second Shape,
"I only died last night!"

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Identity

From a drawing by Elihu Vedder

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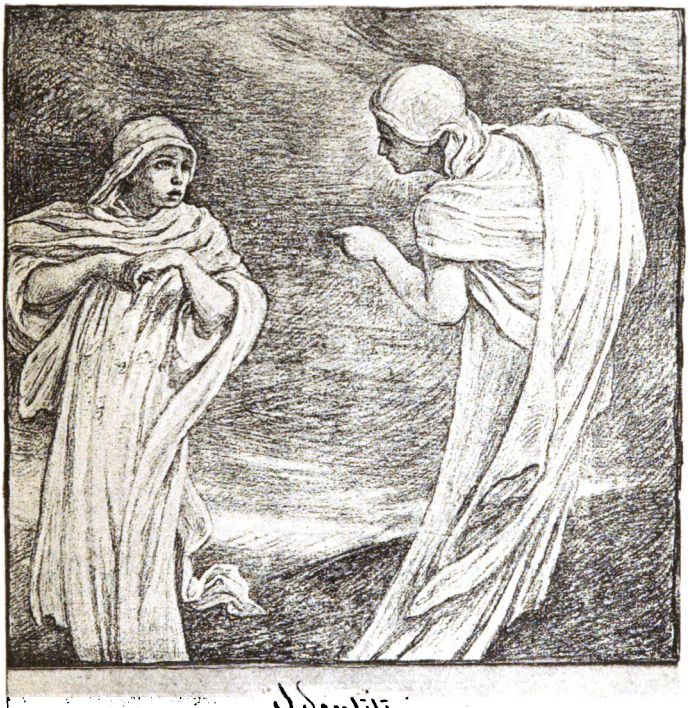

Identity.

Somewhere — in desolate wind-swept space —
In Twilight-land — in No-man's-land —
Two hurrying Shapes met face to face,
And bade each other stand.

"And who are you?" cried one agape,
Shuddering in the gloaming light.
"I know not", said the second Shape,
"I only died last night!"

Thomas Bailey Aldrich.

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LYRICS AND EPICS

I WOULD be the Lyric
Ever on the lip,
Rather than the Epic
Memory lets slip.
I would be the diamond
At my lady's ear,
Rather than the June-rose
Worn but once a year.

A WINTER PIECE

Sous le voile qui vous protége,
Défiant les regards jaloux,
Si vous sortez par cette neige,
Redoutez vos pieds andalous.
THÉOPHILE GAUTIER

BENEATH the heavy veil you wear,
Shielded from jealous eyes you go;
But of your pretty feet have care
If you should venture through the snow.

Howe'er you tread, a tiny mould
Betrays that light foot all the same;

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Upon this glistening, snowy fold
At every step it signs your name.

Thus guided, one might come too close
Upon the slyly-hidden nest
Where Psyche, with her cheek's cold rose,
On Love's warm bosom lies at rest.

KRISS KRINGLE

(Written in a child's album)

JUST as the moon was fading amid her misty rings,
And every stocking was stuffed with childhood's precious things,
Old Kriss Kringle looked round, and saw on the elm-tree bough,
High-hung, an oriole's nest, silent and empty now.
"Quite like a stocking," he laughed, "pinned up there on the tree!
Little I thought the birds expected a present from me!"
Then old Kriss Kringle, who loves a joke as well as the best,
Dropped a handful of flakes in the oriole's empty nest.

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RENCONTRE

TOILING across the Mer de Glace,
I thought of, longed for thee;
What miles between us stretched, alas! —
What miles of land and sea!

My foe, undreamed of, at my side
Stood suddenly, like Fate.
For those who love, the world is wide,
But not for those who hate.

LOVE'S CALENDAR

THE Summer comes and the Summer goes;
Wild-flowers are fringing the dusty lanes,
The swallows go darting through fragrant rains,
Then, all of a sudden — it snows.

Dear Heart, our lives so happily flow,
So lightly we heed the flying hours,
We only know Winter is gone — by the flowers,
We only know Winter is come — by the snow.

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LOST ART

I

When I was young and light of heart
I made sad songs with easy art:
Now I am sad, and no more young,
My sorrow cannot find a tongue.

II

Pray, Muses, since I may not sing
Of Death or any grievous thing,
Teach me some joyous strain, that I
May mock my youth's hypocrisy!

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CLOTH OF GOLD

PROEM

I

You ask us if by rule or no
Our many-colored songs are wrought:
Upon the cunning loom of thought
We weave our fancies, so and so.

II

The busy shuttle comes and goes
Across the rhymes, and deftly weaves
A tissue out of autumn leaves,
With here a thistle, there a rose.

III

With art and patience thus is made
The poet's perfect Cloth of Gold:
When woven so, nor moth nor mould
Nor time can make its colors fade.

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AN ARAB WELCOME

BECAUSE thou com'st, a weary guest,
Unto my tent, I bid thee rest.
This cruse of oil, this skin of wine,
These tamarinds and dates are thine;
And while thou eatest, Medjid, there,
Shall bathe the heated nostrils of thy mare.

Illah il' Allah! Even so
An Arab chieftain treats a foe,
Holds him as one without a fault
Who breaks his bread and tastes his salt;
And, in fair battle, strikes him dead
With the same pleasure that he gives him bread.

A TURKISH LEGEND

A CERTAIN Pasha, dead these thousand years,
Once from his harem fled in sudden tears,

And had this sentence on the city's gate
Deeply engraven, *Only God is great.*

So those four words above the city's noise
Hung like the accents of an angel's voice,

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And evermore, from the high barbacan,
Saluted each returning caravan.

Lost is that city's glory. Every gust
Lifts, with dead leaves, the unknown Pasha's dust.

And all is ruin — save one wrinkled gate
Whereon is written, *Only God is great.*

THE CRESCENT AND THE CROSS

KIND was my friend who, in the Eastern land,
Remembered me with such a gracious hand,
And sent this Moorish Crescent which has been
Worn on the haughty bosom of a queen.
No more it sinks and rises in unrest
To the soft music of her heathen breast;
No barbarous chief shall bow before it more,
No turbaned slave shall envy and adore.

I place beside this relic of the Sun
A Cross of Cedar brought from Lebanon,
Once borne, perchance, by some pale monk who trod
The desert to Jerusalem and his God.
Here do they lie, two symbols of two creeds,

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Each with deep meaning to our human needs,
Both stained with blood, and sacred made by faith,
By tears, and prayers, and martyrdom, and death.
That for the Moslem is, but this for me.
The waning Crescent lacks divinity:
It gives me dreams of battles, and the woes
Of women shut in dim seraglios.
But when this Cross of simple wood I see,
The Star of Bethlehem shines again for me,
And glorious visions break upon my gloom —
The patient Christ, and Mary at the Tomb.

THE UNFORGIVEN

NEAR my bed, there, hangs the picture jewels could
not buy from me:
'T is a Siren, a brown Siren, in her sea-weed dra-
pery,
Playing on a lute of amber, by the margin of a
sea.

In the east, the rose of morning seems as if 't would
blossom soon,
But it never, never blossoms, in this picture; and
the moon
Never ceases to be crescent, and the June is always
June.

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And the heavy-branched banana never yields its
creamy fruit;
In the citron-trees are nightingales forever stricken
mute;
And the Siren sits, her fingers on the pulses of the
lute.

In the hushes of the midnight, when the heliotropes
grow strong
With the dampness, I hear music — hear a quiet,
plaintive song —
A most sad, melodious utterance, as of some im-
mortal wrong;

Like the pleading, oft repeated, of a Soul that
pleads in vain,
Of a damnèd Soul repentant, that would fain be
pure again! —
And I lie awake and listen to the music of her
pain.

And whence comes this mournful music? — whence,
unless it chance to be
From the Siren, the brown Siren, in her sea-weed
drapery,
Playing on a lute of amber, by the margin of a
sea.

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DRESSING THE BRIDE

A FRAGMENT

So, after bath, the slave-girls brought
The broidered raiment for her wear,
The misty izar from Mosul,
The pearls and opals for her hair,
The slippers for her supple feet,
(Two radiant crescent moons they were,)
And lavender, and spikenard sweet,
And attars, nedd, and richest musk.
When they had finished dressing her,
(The Eye of Dawn, the Heart's Desire!)
Like one pale star against the dusk,
A single diamond on her brow
Trembled with its imprisoned fire.

TWO SONGS FROM THE PERSIAN

I

O CEASE, sweet music, let us rest!
Too soon the hateful light is born;
Henceforth let day be counted night,
And midnight called the morn.

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O cease, sweet music, let us rest!
A tearful, languid spirit lies,
Like the dim scent in violets,
In beauty's gentle eyes.

There is a sadness in sweet sound
That quickens tears. O music, lest
We weep with thy strange sorrow, cease!
Be still, and let us rest.

II

Ah! sad are they who know not love,
But, far from passion's tears and smiles,
Drift down a moonless sea, beyond
The silvery coasts of fairy isles.

And sadder they whose longing lips
Kiss empty air, and never touch
The dear warm mouth of those they love —
Waiting, wasting, suffering much.

But clear as amber, fine as musk,
Is life to those who, pilgrim-wise,
Move hand in hand from dawn to dusk,
Each morning nearer Paradise.

Oh, not for them shall angels pray!
They stand in everlasting light,

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They walk in Allah's smile by day,
And slumber in his heart by night.

TIGER-LILIES

I LIKE not lady-slippers,
Nor yet the sweet-pea blossoms,
Nor yet the flaky roses,
Red, or white as snow;
I like the chaliced lilies,
The heavy Eastern lilies,
The gorgeous tiger-lilies,
That in our garden grow.

For they are tall and slender;
Their mouths are dashed with carmine;
And when the wind sweeps by them,
On their emerald stalks
They bend so proud and graceful —
They are Circassian women,
The favorites of the Sultan,
Adown our garden walks.

And when the rain is falling,
I sit beside the window
And watch them glow and glisten,
How they burn and glow!

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Oh for the burning lilies,
The tender Eastern lilies,
The gorgeous tiger-lilies,
That in our garden grow!

THE SULTANA

In the draperies' purple gloom,
In the gilded chamber she stands,
I catch a glimpse of her bosom's bloom,
And the white of her jewelled hands.

Each wandering wind that blows
By the lattice, seems to bear
From her parted lips the scent of the rose,
And the jasmine from her hair.

Her dark-browed odalisques lean
To the fountain's feathery rain,
And a paroquet, by the broidered screen,
Dangles its silvery chain.

But pallid, luminous, cold,
Like a phantom she fills the place,
Sick to the heart, in that cage of gold,
With her sumptuous disgrace.

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THE WORLD'S WAY

At Haroun's court it chanced, upon a time,
An Arab poet made this pleasant rhyme:

"The new moon is a horseshoe, wrought of God,
Wherewith the Sultan's stallion shall be shod."

On hearing this, the Sultan smiled, and gave
The man a gold-piece. *Sing again, O slave!*

Above his lute the happy singer bent,
And turned another gracious compliment.

And, as before, the smiling Sultan gave
The man a sekkah. *Sing again, O slave!*

Again the verse came, fluent as a rill
That wanders, silver-footed, down a hill.

The Sultan, listening, nodded as before,
Still gave the gold, and still demanded more.

The nimble fancy that had climbed so high
Grew weary with its climbing by and by:

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Strange discords rose; the sense went quite
amiss;
The singer's rhymes refused to meet and kiss:

Invention flagged, the lute had got unstrung,
And twice he sang the song already sung.

The Sultan, furious, called a mute, and said,
O Musta, straightway whip me off his head!

Poets! not in Arabia alone
You get beheaded when your skill is gone.

LATAKIA

I

When all the panes are hung with frost,
Wild wizard-work of silver lace,
I draw my sofa on the rug
Before the ancient chimney-place.
Upon the painted tiles are mosques
And minarets, and here and there
A blind muezzin lifts his hands
And calls the faithful unto prayer.
Folded in idle, twilight dreams,

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I hear the hemlock chirp and sing
As if within its ruddy core
It held the happy heart of Spring.
Ferdousi never sang like that,
Nor Saadi grave, nor Hafiz gay:
I lounge, and blow white rings of smoke,
And watch them rise and float away.

II

The curling wreaths like turbans seem
Of silent slaves that come and go —
Or Viziers, packed with craft and crime,
Whom I behead from time to time,
With pipe-stem, at a single blow.

And now and then a lingering cloud
Takes gracious form at my desire,
And at my side my lady stands,
Unwinds her veil with snowy hands —
A shadowy shape, a breath of fire!

O Love, if you were only here
Beside me in this mellow light,
Though all the bitter winds should blow,
And all the ways be choked with snow,
'T would be a true Arabian night!

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WHEN THE SULTAN GOES TO ISPAHAN

When the Sultan Shah-Zaman
Goes to the city Ispahan,
Even before he gets so far
As the place where the clustered palm-trees are,
At the last of the thirty palace-gates,
The flower of the harem, Rose-in-Bloom,
Orders a feast in his favorite room —
Glittering squares of colored ice,
Sweetened with syrop, tinctured with spice,
Creams, and cordials, and sugared dates,
Syrian apples, Othmanee quinces,
Limes, and citrons, and apricots,
And wines that are known to Eastern princes;
And Nubian slaves, with smoking pots
Of spicèd meats and costliest fish
And all that the curious palate could wish,
Pass in and out of the cedarn doors;
Scattered over mosaic floors
Are anemones, myrtles, and violets,
And a musical fountain throws its jets
Of a hundred colors into the air.
The dusk Sultana loosens her hair,
And stains with the henna-plant the tips
Of her pointed nails, and bites her lips

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Till they bloom again; but, alas, *that* rose
Not for the Sultan buds and blows,
Not for the Sultan Shah-Zaman
When he goes to the city Ispahan.

Then at a wave of her sunny hand
The dancing-girls of Samarcand
Glide in like shapes from fairy-land,
Making a sudden mist in air
Of fleecy veils and floating hair
And white arms lifted. Orient blood
Runs in their veins, shines in their eyes.
And there, in this Eastern Paradise,
Filled with the breath of sandal-wood,
And Khoten musk, and aloes and myrrh,
Sits Rose-in-Bloom on a silk divan,
Sipping the wines of Astrakhan;
And her Arab lover sits with her.
That's when the Sultan Shah-Zaman
Goes to the city Ispahan.

Now, when I see an extra light,
Flaming, flickering on the night
From my neighbor's casement opposite,
I know as well as I know to pray,
I know as well as a tongue can say,
That the innocent Sultan Shah-Zaman
Has gone to the city Ispahan.

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A PRELUDE

HASSAN BEN ABDUL at the Ivory Gate
Of Bagdad sat and chattered in the sun,
Like any magpie chattered to himself
And four lank, swarthy Arab boys that stopped
A gambling game with peach-pits, and drew near.
Then Iman Khan, the friend of thirsty souls,
The seller of pure water, ceased his cry,
And placed his water-skins against the gate —
They looked so like him, with their sallow cheeks
Puffed out like Iman's. Then a eunuch came
And swung a pack of sweetmeats from his head,
And stood — a hideous pagan cut in jet.
And then a Jew, whose sandal-straps were red
With desert-dust, limped, cringing, to the crowd;
He, too, would listen; and close after him
A jeweller that glittered like his shop.
Then two blind mendicants, who wished to go
Six diverse ways at once, came stumbling by,
But hearing Hassan chatter, sat them down.
And if the Khalif had been riding near,
He would have paused to listen like the rest,
For Hassan's fame was ripe in all the East.
From white-walled Cairo to far Ispahan,
From Mecca to Damascus, he was known,
Hassan, the Arab with the Singing Heart.

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His songs were sung by boatmen on the Nile,
By Beddowee maidens, and in Tartar camps,
While all men loved him as they loved their eyes;
And when he spake, the wisest, next to him,
Was he who listened. And thus Hassan sung.
— And I, a stranger lingering in Bagdad,
Half English and half Arab, by my beard!
Caught at the gilded epic as it grew,
And for my Christian brothers wrote it down.

TO HAFIZ

THOUGH gifts like thine the fates gave not to me,
One thing, O Hafiz, we both hold in fee —
Nay, it holds us; for when the June wind blows
We both are slaves and lovers to the rose.
In vain the pale Circassian lily shows
Her face at her green lattice, and in vain
The violet beckons, with unveilèd face —
The bosom's white, the lip's light purple stain,
These touch our liking, yet no passion stir.
But when the rose comes, Hafiz — in that place
Where she stands smiling, we kneel down to her!

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AT NIJNII-NOVGOROD

"A CRAFTY Persian set this stone;
A dusk Sultana wore it;
And from her slender finger, sir,
A ruthless Arab tore it.

"A ruby, like a drop of blood —
That deep-in tint that lingers
And seems to melt, perchance was caught
From those poor mangled fingers!

"A spendthrift got it from the knave.
And tossed it, like a blossom,
That night into a dancing-girl's
Accurst and balmy bosom.

"And so it went. One day a Jew
At Cairo chanced to spy it
Amid a one-eyed peddler's pack,
And did not care to buy it —

"Yet bought it all the same. You see,
The Jew he knew a jewel.
He bought it cheap to sell it dear:
The ways of trade are cruel.

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"But I — be Allah's all the praise! —
Such avarice, I scoff it!
If I buy cheap, why, I sell cheap,
Content with modest profit.

"This ring — such chasing! look, milord,
What workmanship! By Heaven,
The price I name you makes the thing
As if the thing were given!

"A stone without a flaw! A queen
Might not disdain to wear it.
Three hundred roubles buys the stone;
No kopeck less, I swear it!"

Thus Hassan, holding up the ring
To me, no eager buyer. —
A hundred roubles was not much
To pay so sweet a liar!

THE LAMENT OF EL MOULOK

Within the sacred precincts of the mosque,
Even on the very steps of St. Sophia,
He lifted up his voice and spoke these words,
El Moulok, who sang naught but love-songs once,
And now was crazed because his son was dead:

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O ye who leave
Your slippers at the portal, as is meet,
Give heed an instant ere ye bow in prayer.

Ages ago,
Allah, grown weary of His myriad worlds,
Would one star more to hang against the blue.

Then of men's bones,
Millions on millions, did He build the earth;

Of women's tears,
Down falling through the night, He made the sea;

Of sighs and sobs
He made the winds that surge about the globe.

Where'er ye tread,
Ye tread on dust that once was living man.

The mist and rain
Are tears that first from human eyelids fell.

The unseen winds
Breathe endless lamentation for the dead.

Not so the ancient tablets told the tale,
Not so the Koran! This was blasphemy,

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And they that heard El Moulok dragged him thence,
Even from the very steps of St. Sophia,
And loaded him with triple chains of steel,
And cast him in a dungeon.

None the less
Do women's tears fall ceaseless day and night,
And none the less do mortals faint and die
And turn to dust; and every wind that blows
About the globe seems heavy with the grief
Of those who sorrow, or have sorrowed, here.
Yet none the less is Allah the Most High,
The Clement, the Compassionate. He sees
Where we are blind, and hallowed be His Name!

NOURMADEE

THE POET MIRTZY MOHAMMED-ALI TO HIS FRIEND ABOU-HASSEM IN ALGEZIRAS

O HASSEM, greeting! Peace be thine!
With thee and thine be all things well!
Give refuge to these words of mine.
The strange mischance which late befell
Thy servant must have reached thine ear;
Rumor has flung it far and wide,
With dark additions, as I hear.

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When They-Say speaks, what ills betide!
So lend no credence, O my Friend,
To scandals, fattening as they fly.
Love signs and seals the roll I send:
Read thou the truth with lenient eye.

In Yússuf's garden at Tangier
This happened. In his cool kiosk
We sat partaking of his cheer —
Thou know'st that garden by the Mosque
Of Irma; stately palms are there,
And silver fish in marble tanks,
And scents of jasmine in the air —
We sat and feasted, with due thanks
To Allah, till the pipes were brought;
And no one spoke, for Pleasure laid
Her finger on the lips of Thought.
Then, on a sudden, came a maid,
With tambourine, to dance for us —
Allah il' Allah! it was she,
The slave-girl from the Bosphorus
That Yússuf purchased recently.

Long narrow eyes, as black as black!
And melting, like the stars in June;
Tresses of night drawn smoothly back
From eyebrows like the crescent moon.
She paused an instant with bowed head,

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Then, at a motion of her wrist,
A veil of gossamer outspread
And wrapped her in a silver mist.
Her tunic was of Tiflis green
Shot through with many a starry speck;
The zone that clasped it might have been
A collar for a cygnet's neck.
None of the thirty charms she lacked
Demanded for perfection's grace;
Charm upon charm in her was packed
Like rose leaves in a costly vase.
Full in the lanterns' colored light
She seemed a thing of Paradise.
I knew not if I saw aright,
Or if my vision told me lies.
Those lanterns spread a cheating glare;
Such stains they threw from bough and vine
As if the slave-boys, here and there,
Had spilled a jar of brilliant wine.
And then the fountain's drowsy fall,
The burning aloes' heavy scent,
The night, the place, the hour — they all
Were full of subtle blandishment.

Much had I heard of Nourmadee —
The name of this fair slenderness —
Whom Yússuf kept with lock and key
Because her beauty wrought distress
In all men's hearts that gazed on it;

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And much I marvelled why, this night,
Yússuf should have the little wit
To lift her veil for our delight.
For though the other guests were old —
Grave, worthy merchants, three from Fez
(These mostly dealt in dyes and gold),
Cloth merchants two, from Mekînez —
Though they were old and gray and dry,
Forgetful of their youth's desires,
My case was different, for I
Still knew the touch of springtime fires.
And straightway as I looked on her
I bit my lip, grew ill at ease,
And in my veins was that strange stir
Which clothes with bloom the almond-trees.

O Shape of blended fire and snow!
Each clime to her some spell had lent —
The North her cold, the South her glow,
Her languors all the Orient.
Her scarf was as the cloudy fleece
The moon draws round its loveliness,
That so its beauty may increase
The more in being seen the less.
And as she moved, and seemed to float —
So floats a swan! — in sweet unrest,
A string of sequins at her throat
Went clink and clink against her breast.
And what did some birth-fairy do

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But set a mole, a golden dot,
Close to her lip — to pierce men through!
How could I look and love her not?

Yet heavy was my heart as stone,
For well I knew that love was vain;
To love the thing one may not own! —
I saw how all my peace was slain.
Coffers of ingots Yússuf had,
Houses on land, and ships at sea,
And I — alas! was I gone mad,
To cast my eyes on Nourmadee!
I strove to thrust her from my mind,
I bent my brows, and turned away,
And wished that Fate had struck me blind
Ere I had come to know that day.
I fixed my thoughts on this and that;
Assessed the worth of Yússuf's ring;
Counted the colors in the mat —
And then a bird began to sing,
A bulbul hidden in a bough.
From time to time it loosed a strain
Of moonlit magic that, somehow,
Brought solace to my troubled brain.

But when the girl once, creeping close,
Half stooped, and looked me in the face,
My reason fled, and I arose
And cried to Yússuf, from my place:

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"O Yússuf, give to me this girl!
You are so rich and I so poor!
You would not miss one little pearl
Like that from out your countless store!"
"'This girl'? What girl? No girl is here!"
Cried Yússuf with his eyes agleam;
"Now, by the Prophet, it is clear
Our friend has had a pleasant dream!"
(And then it seems that I awoke,
And stared around, no little dazed
At finding naught of what I spoke:
Each guest sat silent and amazed.)

Then Yússuf — of all mortal men
This Yússuf has a mocking tongue! —
Stood at my side, and spoke again:
"O Mirtzy, I too once was young.
With mandolin or dulcimer
I 've waited many a midnight through,
Content to catch one glimpse of Her,
And have my turban drenched with dew.
By Her I mean some slim Malay,
Some Andalusian with her fan
(For I have travelled in my day),
Or some swart beauty of Soudán.
No Barmecide was I to fare
On fancy's shadowy wine and meat;
No phantom moulded out of air
Had spells to lure me to her feet.

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O Mirtzy, be it understood
I blame you not. Your sin is slight!
You fled the world of flesh and blood,
And loved a vision of the night!
Sweeter than musk such visions be
As come to poets when they sleep!
You dreamed you saw fair Nourmadee?
Go to! it is a pearl I keep!"

By Allah, but his touch was true!
And I was humbled to the dust
That I in those grave merchants' view
Should seem a thing no man might trust.
For he of creeping things is least
Who, while he breaks of friendship's bread,
Betrays the giver of the feast.
"Good friends, I 'm not that man!" I said.
"O Yússuf, shut not Pardon's gate!
The words I spake I no wise meant.
Who holds the threads of Time and Fate
Sends dreams. I dreamt the dream he sent.
I am as one that from a trance
Awakes confused, and reasons ill;
The world of men invites his glance,
The world of shadows claims him still.
I see those lights among the leaves,
Yourselves I see, sedate and wise,
And yet some finer sense perceives
A presence that eludes the eyes.

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"Beware of Wines from Ispahan"

From a drawing by H. Siddons Mowbray

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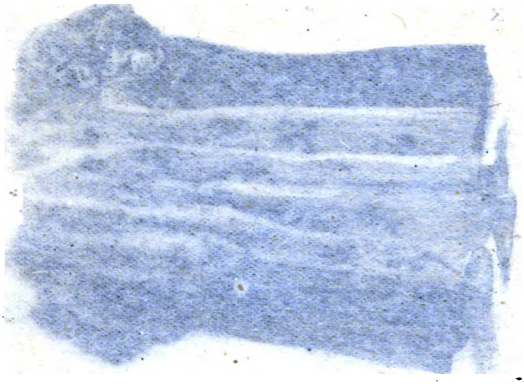

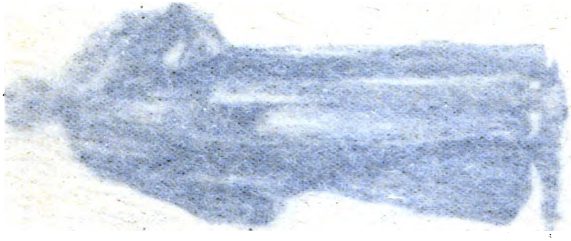

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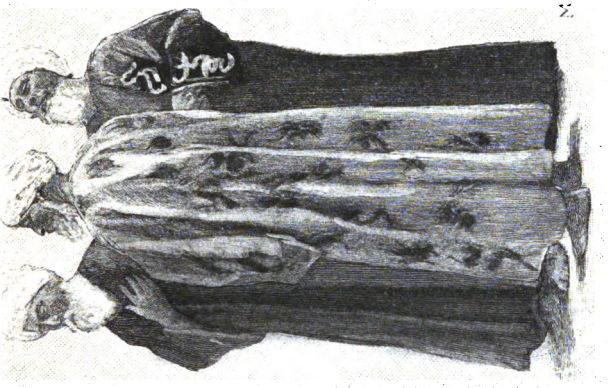

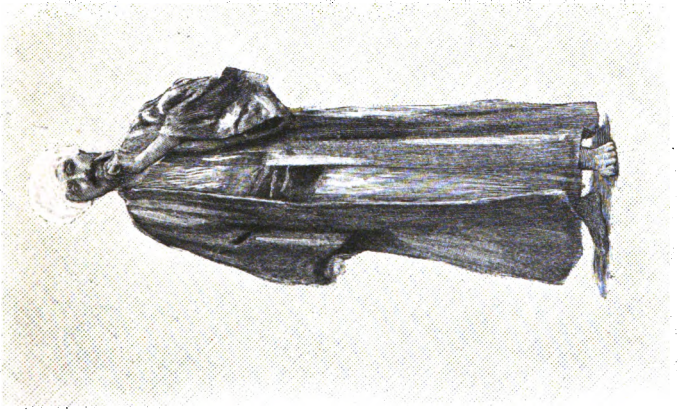

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Of what is gone there seems to stay
Some subtlety, to mock my pains:
So, when a rose is borne away,
The fragrance of the rose remains!"
Then Yússuf laughed, Abdallah leered,
And Melik coughed behind his hand,
And lean Ben-Auda stroked his beard
As who should say, "We understand!"
And though the fault was none of mine,
As I explained and made appear,
Since then I 've not been asked to dine
In Yússuf's garden at Tangier.

FAREWELL, O Hassem! Peace be thine!
With thee and thine be always Peace!
To virtue let thy steps incline,
And may thy shadow not decrease!
Get wealth — wealth makes the dullard's jest
Seem witty where true wit falls flat;
Do good, for goodness still is best —
But then the Koran tells thee that.
Know Patience here, and later Bliss;
Grow wise, trust woman, doubt not man;
And when thou dinest out — mark this —
Beware of wines from Ispahan!

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FRIAR JEROME'S BEAUTIFUL BOOK ETC.

FRIAR JEROME'S BEAUTIFUL BOOK

A. D. 1200

THE Friar Jerome, for some slight sin,
Done in his youth, was struck with woe.
"When I am dead," quoth Friar Jerome,
"Surely, I think my soul will go
Shuddering through the darkened spheres,
Down to eternal fires below!
I shall not dare from that dread place
To lift mine eyes to Jesus' face,
Nor Mary's, as she sits adored
At the feet of Christ the Lord.
Alas! December's all too brief
For me to hope to wipe away
The memory of my sinful May!"
And Friar Jerome was full of grief
That April evening, as he lay
On the straw pallet in his cell.
He scarcely heard the curfew-bell

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Calling the brotherhood to prayer;
But he arose, for 't was his care
Nightly to feed the hungry poor
That crowded to the Convent door.

His choicest duty it had been:
But this one night it weighed him down.
"What work for an immortal soul,
To feed and clothe some lazy clown?
Is there no action worth my mood,
No deed of daring, high and pure,
That shall, when I am dead, endure,
A well-spring of perpetual good?"

And straight he thought of those great tomes
With clamps of gold — the Convent's boast —
How they endured, while kings and realms
Passed into darkness and were lost;
How they had stood from age to age,
Clad in their yellow vellum-mail,
'Gainst which the Paynim's godless rage,
The Vandal's fire, could naught avail:
Though heathen sword-blows fell like hail,
Though cities ran with Christian blood,
Imperishable they had stood!
They did not seem like books to him,
But Heroes, Martyrs, Saints — themselves
The things they told of, not mere books
Ranged grimly on the oaken shelves.

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To those dim alcoves, far withdrawn,
He turned with measured steps and slow,
Trimming his lantern as he went;
And there, among the shadows, bent
Above one ponderous folio,
With whose miraculous text were blent
Seraphic faces: Angels, crowned
With rings of melting amethyst;
Mute, patient Martyrs, cruelly bound
To blazing fagots; here and there,
Some bold, serene Evangelist,
Or Mary in her sunny hair;
And here and there from out the words
A brilliant tropic bird took flight;
And through the margins many a vine
Went wandering — roses, red and white,
Tulip, wind-flower, and columbine
Blossomed. To his believing mind
These things were real, and the wind,
Blown through the mullioned window, took
Scent from the lilies in the book.

"Santa Maria!" cried Friar Jerome,
"Whatever man illumined this,
Though he were steeped heart-deep in sin,
Was worthy of unending bliss,
And no doubt hath it! Ah! dear Lord,
Might I so beautify Thy Word!
What sacristan, the convents through,

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Transcribes with such precision? who
Does such initials as I do?
Lo! I will gird me to this work,
And save me, ere the one chance slips.
On smooth, clean parchment I'll engross
The Prophet's fell Apocalypse;
And as I write from day to day,
Perchance my sins will pass away."

So Friar Jerome began his Book.
From break of dawn till curfew-chime
He bent above the lengthening page,
Like some rapt poet o'er his rhyme.
He scarcely paused to tell his beads,
Except at night; and then he lay
And tossed, unrestful, on the straw,
Impatient for the coming day —
Working like one who feels, perchance,
That, ere the longed-for goal be won,
Ere Beauty bare her perfect breast,
Black Death may pluck him from the sun.
At intervals the busy brook,
Turning the mill-wheel, caught his ear;
And through the grating of the cell
He saw the honeysuckles peer,
And knew 't was summer, that the sheep
In fragrant pastures lay asleep,
And felt, that, somehow, God was near.
In his green pulpit on the elm,

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The robin, abbot of that wood,
Held forth by times; and Friar Jerome
Listened, and smiled, and understood.

While summer wrapped the blissful land
What joy it was to labor so,
To see the long-tressed Angels grow
Beneath the cunning of his hand,
Vignette and tail-piece subtly wrought!
And little recked he of the poor
That missed him at the Convent door;
Or, thinking of them, put the thought
Aside. "I feed the souls of men
Henceforth, and not their bodies!"— yet
Their sharp, pinched features, now and then,
Stole in between him and his Book,
And filled him with a vague regret.

Now on that region fell a blight:
The grain grew cankered in its sheath;
And from the verdurous uplands rolled
A sultry vapor fraught with death —
A poisonous mist, that, like a pall,
Hung black and stagnant over all.
Then came the sickness — the malign,
Green-spotted terror called the Pest,
That took the light from loving eyes,
And made the young bride's gentle breast
A fatal pillow. Ah! the woe,

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The crime, the madness that befell!
In one short night that vale became
More foul than Dante's inmost hell.
Men cursed their wives; and mothers left
Their nursing babes alone to die,
And wantoned, singing, through the streets,
With shameless brow and frenzied eye;
And senseless clowns, not fearing God —
Such power the spotted fever had —
Razed Cragwood Castle on the hill,
Pillaged the wine-bins, and went mad.
And evermore that dreadful pall
Of mist hung stagnant over all:
By day, a sickly light broke through
The heated fog, on town and field;
By night, the moon, in anger, turned
Against the earth its mottled shield.

Then from the Convent, two and two,
The Prior chanting at their head,
The monks went forth to shrive the sick,
And give the hungry grave its dead —
Only Jerome, he went not forth,
But muttered in his dusty nook,
"Let come what will, I must illume
The last ten pages of my Book!"
He drew his stool before the desk,
And sat him down, distraught and wan,
To paint his daring masterpiece,
The stately figure of Saint John.

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He sketched the head with pious care,
Laid in the tint, when, powers of Grace!
He found a grinning Death's-head there,
And not the grand Apostle's face!

Then up he rose with one long cry:
"'T is Satan's self does this," cried he,
"Because I shut and barred my heart
When Thou didst loudest call to me!
O Lord, Thou know'st the thoughts of men,
Thou know'st that I did yearn to make
Thy Word more lovely to the eyes
Of sinful souls, for Christ his sake!
Nathless, I leave the task undone:
I give up all to follow Thee —
Even like him who gave his nets
To winds and waves by Galilee!"

Which said, he closed the precious Book
In silence, with a reverent hand;
And drawing his cowl about his face
Went forth into the stricken land.
And there was joy in Heaven that day —
More joy o'er this forlorn old friar
Than over fifty sinless men
Who never struggled with desire!

What deeds he did in that dark town,
What hearts he soothed with anguish torn,

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What weary ways of woe he trod,
Are written in the Book of God,
And shall be read at Judgment Morn.
The weeks crept on, when, one still day.
God's awful presence filled the sky,
And that black vapor floated by,
And lo! the sickness passed away.
With silvery clang, by thorp and town,
The bells made merry in their spires:
O God! to think the Pest is flown!
Men kissed each other on the street,
And music piped to dancing feet
The livelong night, by roaring fires!

Then Friar Jerome, a wasted shape—
For he had taken the Plague at last—
Rose up, and through the happy town,
And through the wintry woodlands, passed
Into the Convent. What a gloom
Sat brooding in each desolate room!
What silence in the corridor!
For of that long, innumerous train
Which issued forth a month before
Scarce twenty had come back again!

Counting his rosary step by step,
With a forlorn and vacant air,
Like some unshriven churchyard thing,
The Friar crawled up the mouldy stair

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To his damp cell, that he might look
Once more on his belovèd Book.

And there it lay upon the stand,
Open! — he had not left it so.
He grasped it, with a cry; for, lo!
He saw that some angelic hand,
While he was gone, had finished it!
There 't was complete, as he had planned;
There, at the end, stood **Finis**, writ
And gilded as no man could do —
Not even that pious anchoret,
Bilfrid, the wonderful, nor yet
The miniatore Ethelwold,
Nor Durham's Bishop, who of old
(England still hoards the priceless leaves)
Did the Four Gospels all in gold.
And Friar Jerome nor spoke nor stirred,
But, with his eyes fixed on that word,
He passed from sin and want and scorn;
And suddenly the chapel-bells
Rang in the holy Christmas-Morn.

In those wild wars which racked the land
Since then, and kingdoms rent in twain,
The Friar's Beautiful Book was lost —
That miracle of hand and brain:
Yet, though its leaves were torn and tossed,
The volume was not writ in vain!

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MIANTOWONA

I

Long ere the Pale Face
Crossed the Great Water,
Miantowona
Passed, with her beauty,
Into a legend
Pure as a wild-flower
Found in a broken
Ledge by the seaside.

Let us revere them —
These wildwood legends,
Born of the camp-fire.
Let them be handed
Down to our children —
Richest of heirlooms.
No land may claim them:
They are ours only,
Like our grand rivers,
Like our vast prairies,
Like our dead heroes.

II

In the pine-forest,
Guarded by shadows,

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Lieth the haunted
Pond of the Red Men.
Ringed by the emerald
Mountains, it lies there
Like an untarnished
Buckler of silver,
Dropped in that valley
By the Great Spirit!
Weird are the figures
Traced on its margins —
Vine-work and leaf-work,
Down-drooping fuchsias,
Knots of sword-grasses,
Moonlight and starlight,
Clouds scudding northward.
Sometimes an eagle
Flutters across it;
Sometimes a single
Star on its bosom
Nestles till morning.

Far in the ages,
Miantowona,
Rose of the Hurons,
Came to these waters.
Where the dank greensward
Slopes to the pebbles,
Miantowona
Sat in her anguish.

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Ice to her maidens,
Ice to the chieftains,
Fire to her lover!
Here he had won her,
Here they had parted,
Here could her tears flow.
With unwet eyelash,
Miantowona
Nursed her old father,
Gray-eyed Tawanda,
Oldest of Hurons,
Soothed his complainings,
Smiled when he chid her
Vaguely for nothing —
He was so weak now,
Like a shrunk cedar
White with the hoar-frost.
Sometimes she gently
Linked arms with maidens,
Joined in their dances:
Not with her people,
Not in the wigwam,
Wept for her lover.

Ah! who was like him?
Fleet as an arrow,
Strong as a bison,
Lithe as a panther,
Soft as the south-wind,

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Who was like Wawah?
There is one other
Stronger and fleeter,
Bearing no wampum,
Wearing no war-paint,
Ruler of councils,
Chief of the war-path —
Who can gainsay him,
Who can defy him?
His is the lightning,
His is the whirlwind,
Let us be humble,
We are but ashes —
'T is the Great Spirit!

Ever at nightfall
Miantowona
Strayed from the lodges,
Passed through the shadows
Into the forest:
There by the pond-side
Spread her black tresses
Over her forehead.
Sad is the loon's cry
Heard in the twilight;
Sad is the night-wind,
Moaning and moaning;
Sadder the stifled
Sob of a widow.

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Low on the pebbles
Murmured the water:
Often she fancied
It was young Wawah
Playing the reed-flute.
Sometimes a dry branch
Snapped in the forest:
Then she rose, startled,
Ruddy as sunrise,
Warm for his coming!
But when he came not,
Back through the darkness,
Half broken-hearted,
Miantowona
Went to her people.

When an old oak dies,
First 't is the tree-tops,
Then the low branches,
Then the gaunt stem goes:
So fell Tawanda,
Oldest of Hurons,
Chief of the chieftains.

Miantowona
Wept not, but softly
Closed the sad eyelids;
With her own fingers

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Fastened the deer-skin
Over his shoulders;
Then laid beside him
Ash-bow and arrows,
Pipe-bowl and wampum,
Dried corn and bear-meat —
All that was needful
On the long journey.
Thus old Tawanda
Went to the hunting
Grounds of the Red Man.
Then, as the dirges
Rose from the village,
Miantowona
Stole from the mourners,
Stole through the cornfields,
Passed like a phantom
Into the shadows
Through the pine forest.

One who had watched her —
It was Nahoho,
Loving her vainly —
Saw, as she passed him,
That in her features
Made his stout heart quail.
He could but follow.
Quick were her footsteps,

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Light as a snowflake,
Leaving no traces
On the white clover.

Like a trained runner,
Winner of prizes,
Into the woodlands
Plunged the young chieftain.
Once he abruptly
Halted, and listened;
Then he sped forward
Faster and faster
Toward the bright water.
Breathless he reached it.
Why did he crouch then,
Stark as a statue?
What did he see there
Could so appall him?
Only a circle
Swiftly expanding,
Fading before him;
But, as he watched it,
Up from the centre,
Slowly, superbly,
Rose a Pond-Lily.

One cry of wonder,
Shrill as the loon's call,
Rang through the forest,

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Startling the silence,
Startling the mourners
Chanting the death-song.
Forth from the village,
Flocking together
Came all the Hurons —
Striplings and warriors,
Maidens and old men,
Squaws with pappooses.
No word was spoken:
There stood the Hurons
On the dank greensward,
With their swart faces
Bowed in the twilight.
What did they see there?
Only a Lily
Rocked on the azure
Breast of the water.

Then they turned sadly
One to another,
Tenderly murmuring,
"Miantowona!"
Soft as the dew falls
Down through the midnight,
Cleaving the starlight,
Echo repeated,
"Miantowona!"

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THE GUERDON

Vedder, this legend, if it had its due,
Would not be sung by me, but told by you
In colors such as Tintoretto knew.

SOOTHED by the fountain's drowsy murmuring —
Or was it by the west-wind's indolent wing? —
The grim court-poet fell asleep one day
In the lords' chamber, when chance brought that way
The Princess Margaret with a merry train
Of damozels and ladies — flippant, vain
Court-butterflies — midst whom fair Margaret
Swayed like a rathe and slender lily set
In rustling leaves, for all her drapery
Was green and gold, and lovely as could be.

Midway in hall the fountain rose and fell,
Filling a listless Naiad's outstretched shell
And weaving rainbows in the shifting light.
Upon the carven friezes, left and right,
Was pictured Pan asleep beside his reed.
In this place all things seemed asleep, indeed —
The hook-billed parrot on his pendent ring,
Sitting high-shouldered, half forgot to swing;
The wind scarce stirred the hangings at the door,
And from the silken arras evermore
Yawned drowsy dwarfs with satyr's face and hoof.

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A forest of gold pillars propped the roof,
And like one slim gold pillar overthrown,
The sunlight through a great stained window shone
And lay across the body of Alain.
You would have thought, perchance, the man was slain:
As if the checkered column in its fall
Had caught and crushed him, he lay dead to all.
The parrot's gray bead eye as good as said,
Unclosing viciously, "The clown is dead."
A dragon-fly in narrowing circles neared,
And lit, secure, upon the dead man's beard,
Then spread its iris vans in quick dismay,
And into the blue summer sped away!

Little was his of outward grace to win
The eyes of maids, but white the soul within.
Misshaped, and hideous to look upon
Was this man, dreaming in the noontide sun,
With sunken eyes and winter-whitened hair
And sallow cheeks deep seamed with thought and care.
And so the laughing ladies of the court,
Coming upon him suddenly, stopped short,
And shrunk together with a nameless dread:
Some, but fear held them, would have turned and fled,
Seeing the uncouth figure lying there.
But Princess Margaret, with her heavy hair

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From out its diamond fillet rippling down,
Slipped from the group, and plucking back her gown
With white left hand, stole softly to his side —
The fair court gossips staring, curious-eyed,
Half mockingly. A little while she stood,
Finger on lip; then, with the agile blood
Climbing her cheek, and silken lashes wet —
She scarce knew what vague pity or regret
Wet them — she stooped, and for a moment's space
Her golden tresses touched the sleeper's face.
Then she stood straight, as lily on its stem,
But hearing her ladies titter, turned on them
Her great queen's eyes, grown black with scornful frown —
Great eyes that looked the shallow women down.
"Nay, not for love" — one rosy palm she laid
Softly against her bosom — "as I 'm a maid!
Full well I know what cruel things you say
Of this and that, but hold your peace to-day.
I pray you think no evil thing of this.
Nay, not for love's sake did I give the kiss,
Not for his beauty who 's nor fair nor young,
But for the songs which those mute lips have sung."

That was a right brave princess, one, I hold,
Worthy to wear a crown of beaten gold.

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TITA'S TEARS

A FANTASY

A CERTAIN man of Ischia — it is thus
The story runs — one Lydus Claudius,
After a life of threescore years and ten,
Passed suddenly from out the sphere of men
Into the sphere of phantoms.
In a vale
Where shoals of spirits against the moonlight pale
Surged ever upward, in a wan-lit place
Near heaven, he met a Presence face to face —
A figure like a carving on a spire,
Shrouded in wings and with a fillet of fire
About the brows — who stayed him there, and said:
"This the gods grant to thee, O newly dead!
Whatever thing on earth thou holdest dear
Shall, at thy bidding, be transported here,
Save wife or child, or any living thing."
Then straightway Claudius fell to wondering
What he should wish for. Having heaven at hand,
His wants were few, as you can understand;
Riches and titles, matters dear to us,
To him, of course, were now superfluous.
But Tita, small brown Tita, his young wife,
A two weeks' bride when he took leave of life,
What would become of her without his care?

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Tita, so rich, so thoughtless, and so fair!
At present crushed with sorrow, to be sure —
But by and by? What earthly griefs endure?
They pass like joys. A year, three years at most,
And would she mourn her lord, so quickly lost?
With fine, prophetic ear, he heard afar
The tinkling of some horrible guitar
Under her balcony. "Such thing could be,"
Sighed Claudius; "I would she were with me,
Safe from all harm." But as that wish was vain,
He let it drift from out his troubled brain
(His highly trained austerity was such
That self-denial never cost him much),
And strove to think what object he might name
Most closely linked with the bereavèd dame.
Her wedding ring? — 't would be too small to wear;
Perhaps a ringlet of her raven hair?
If not, her portrait, done in cameo,
Or on a background of pale gold? But no,
Such trifles jarred with his severity.
At last he thought: "The thing most meet for me
Would be that antique flask wherein my bride
Let fall her heavy tears the night I died."
(It was a custom of that simple day
To have one's tears sealed up and laid away,
As everlasting tokens of regret —
They find the bottles in Greek ruins yet.)
For this he wished, then.

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Swifter than a thought
The Presence vanished, and the flask was brought —
Slender, bell-mouthed, and painted all around
With jet-black tulips on a saffron ground;
A tiny jar, of porcelain if you will,
Which twenty tears would rather more than fill.
With careful fingers Claudius broke the seal
When, suddenly, a well-known merry peal
Of laughter leapt from out the vial's throat,
And died, as dies the wood-bird's distant note.
Claudius stared; then, struck with strangest fears,
Reversed the flask —
Alas, for Tita's tears!

A BALLAD

A. D. 1700

BRETAGNE had not her peer. In the Province far
or near
There were never such brown tresses, such a faultless hand;
She had youth, and she had gold, she had jewels
all untold,
And many a lover bold wooed the Lady of the
Land.

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But she, with queenliest grace, bent low her pallid face,
And "Woo me not, for Jesus' sake, fair gentlemen," she said.
If they wooed, then — with a frown she would strike their passion down:
She might have wed a crown to the ringlets on her head.

From the dizzy castle-tips, hour by hour she watched the ships,
Like sheeted phantoms coming and going evermore,
While the twilight settled down on the sleepy seaport town,
On the gables peaked and brown, that had sheltered kings of yore.

Dusky belts of cedar-wood partly clasped the widening flood;
Like a knot of daisies lay the hamlets on the hill;
In the hostelry below sparks of light would come and go,
And faint voices, strangely low, from the garrulous old mill.

Here the land in grassy swells gently broke; there sunk in dells
With mosses green and purple, and prongs of rock and peat;

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Here, in statue-like repose, an old wrinkled mountain rose,
With its hoary head in snows, and wild roses at its feet.

And so oft she sat alone in the turret of gray stone,
And looked across the moorland, so woful, to the sea,
That there grew a village-cry, how her cheek did lose its dye,
As a ship, once, sailing by, faded on the sapphire lea.

Her few walks led all one way, and all ended at the gray
And ragged, jagged rocks that fringe the lonely beach;
There she would stand, the Sweet! with the white surf at her feet,
While above her wheeled the fleet sparrow-hawk with startling screech.

And she ever loved the sea, with its haunting mystery,
Its whispering weird voices, its never-ceasing roar:
And 't was well that, when she died, they made her a grave beside
The blue pulses of the tide, by the towers of Castelnore.

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Now, one chill November dawn, many russet au
tumns gone,
A strange ship with folded wings lay idly off the
lea;
It had lain throughout the night with its wings of
murky white
Folded, after weary flight — the worn nursling of
the sea.

Crowds of peasants flocked the sands; there were
tears and clasping hands;
And a sailor from the ship stalked through the
church-yard gate.
Then amid the grass that crept, fading, over her
who slept,
How he hid his face and wept, crying, *Late, too
late! too late!*

And they called her cold. God knows. . . . Under-
neath the winter snows
The invisible hearts of flowers grow ripe for blos-
soming!
And the lives that look so cold, if their stories
could be told,
Would seem cast in gentler mould, would seem full
of love and spring.

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THE LEGEND OF ARA-CŒLI

I

Looking at Fra Gervasio,
Wrinkled and withered and old and gray,
A dry Franciscan from crown to toe,
You would never imagine, by any chance,
That, in the convent garden one day,
He spun this thread of golden romance.

Romance to me, but to him, indeed,
'T was a matter that did not hold a doubt;
A miracle, nothing more nor less.
Did I think it strange that, in our need,
Leaning from Heaven to our distress,
The Virgin brought such things about —
Gave mute things speech, made dead things move? —
Mother of Mercy, Lady of Love!
Besides, I might, if I wished, behold
The Bambino's self in his cloth of gold
And silver tissue, lying in state
In the Sacristy. Would the signor wait?

Whoever will go to Rome may see,
In the chapel of the Sacristy
Of Ara-Cœli, the Sainted Child —

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Garnished from throat to foot with rings
And brooches and precious offerings,
And its little nose kissed quite away
By dying lips. At Epiphany,
If the holy winter day prove mild,
It is shown to the wondering, gaping crowd
On the church's steps — held high aloft —
While every sinful head is bowed,
And the music plays, and the censers' soft
White breath ascends like silent prayer.

Many a beggar kneeling there,
Tattered and hungry, without a home,
Would not envy the Pope of Rome,
If he, the beggar, had half the care
Bestowed on *him* that falls to the share
Of yonder Image — for you must know
It has its minions to come and go,
Its perfumed chamber, remote and still,
Its silken couch, and its jewelled throne,
And a special carriage of its own
To take the air in, when it will;
And though it may neither drink nor eat,
By a nod to its ghostly seneschal
It could have of the choicest wine and meat.
Often some princess, brown and tall,
Comes, and unclasping from her arm
The glittering bracelet, leaves it, warm
With her throbbing pulse, at the Baby's feet.

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Ah, he is loved by high and low,
Adored alike by simple and wise.
The people kneel to him in the street.
What a felicitous lot is his —
To lie in the light of ladies' eyes,
Petted and pampered, and never to know
The want of a dozen *soldi* or so!
And what does he do for all of this?
What does the little Bambino do?
It cures the sick, and, in fact, 't is said
Can almost bring life back to the dead.
Who doubts it? Not Fra Gervasio.
When one falls ill, it is left alone
For a while with one — and the fever 's gone!

At least, 't was once so; but to-day
It is never permitted, unattended
By monk or priest, to work its lure
At sick folks' beds — all that was ended
By one poor soul whose feeble clay
Satan tempted and made secure.

It was touching this very point the friar
Told me the legend, that afternoon,
In the cloisteral garden all on fire
With scarlet poppies and golden stalks.
Here and there on the sunny walks,
Startled by some slight sound we made,
A lizard, awaking from its swoon,

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Shot like an arrow into the shade.
I can hear the fountain's languorous tune,
(How it comes back, that hour in June
When just to exist was joy enough!)
I can see the olives, silvery-gray,
The carven masonry rich with stains,
The gothic windows with lead-set panes,
The flag-paved cortile, the convent grates,
And Fra Gervasio holding his snuff
In a squirrel-like meditative way
'Twixt finger and thumb. But the Legend waits.

II

It was long ago (so long ago
That Fra Gervasio did not know
What year of our Lord), there came to Rome
Across the Campagna's flaming red,
A certain Filippo and his wife —
Peasants, and very newly wed.
In the happy spring and blossom of life,
When the light heart chirrups to lovers' calls,
These two, like a pair of birds, had come
And built their nest 'gainst the city's walls.

He, with his scanty garden-plots,
Raised flowers and fruit for the market-place,
Where she, with her pensile, flower-like face —
Own sister to her forget-me-nots —

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Played merchant: and so they thrived apace,
In humble content, with humble cares,
And modest longings, till, unawares,
Sorrow crept on them; for to their nest
Had come no little ones, and at last
When six or seven summers had passed,
Seeing no baby at her breast,
The husband brooded, and then grew cold;
Scolded and fretted over this —
Who would tend them when they were old,
And palsied, may be, sitting alone,
Hungry, beside the cold hearth-stone?
Not to have children, like the rest!
It cankered the very heart of bliss.

Then he fell into indolent ways,
Neglecting the garden for days and days,
Playing at *mora*, drinking wine,
With this and that one — letting the vine
Run riot and die for want of care,
And the choke-weeds gather; for it was spring,
When everything needed nurturing.
But he would drowse for hours in the sun,
Or sit on the broken step by the shed,
Like a man whose honest toil is done,
Sullen, with never a word to spare,
Or a word that were better all unsaid.
And Nina, so light of thought before,
Singing about the cottage door

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In her mountain dialect — sang no more;
But came and went, sad-faced and shy,
Wishing, at times, that she might die,
Brooding and fretting in her turn.
Often, in passing along the street,
Her basket of flowers poised, peasant-wise,
On a lustrous braided coil of her hair,
She would halt, and her dusky cheek would burn
Like a poppy, beholding at her feet
Some stray little urchin, dirty and bare.
And sudden tears would spring to her eyes
That the tiny waif was not her own,
To fondle, and kiss, and teach to pray.
Then she passed onward, making moan.
Sometimes she would stand in the sunny square,
Like a slim bronze statue of Despair,
Watching the children at their play.

In the broad piazza was a shrine,
With Our Lady holding on her knee
A small nude waxen effigy.
Nina passed by it every day,
And morn and even, in rain or shine,
Repeated an *ave* there. "Divine
Mother," she 'd cry, as she turned away,
"Sitting in paradise, undefiled,
Oh, have pity on my distress!"
Then glancing back at the rosy Child,

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She would cry to it, in her helplessness,
"Pray her to send the like to me!"

Now once as she knelt before the saint,
Lifting her hands in silent pain,
She paled, and her heavy heart grew faint
At a thought which flashed across her brain —
The blinding thought that, perhaps if she
Had lived in the world's miraculous morn
God might have chosen *her* to be
The mother — Oh, heavenly ecstasy! —
Of the little babe in the manger born!
She, too, was a peasant girl, like her,
The wife of the lowly carpenter!
Like Joseph's wife, a peasant girl!

Her strange little head was in a whirl
As she rose from her knees to wander home,
Leaving her basket at the shrine;
So dazed was she, she scarcely knew
The old familiar streets of Rome,
Nor whither she wished to go, in fine;
But wandered on, now crept, now flew,
In the gathering twilight, till she came
Breathless, bereft of sense and sight,
To the gloomy Arch of Constantine,
And there they found her, late that night,
With her cheeks like snow and her lips like flame!

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Many a time from day to day,
She heard, as if in a troubled dream,
Footsteps around her, and some one saying —
Was it Filippo? — "Is she dead?"
Then it was some one near her praying,
And she was drifting — drifting away
From saints and martyrs in endless glory!
She seemed to be floating down a stream,
Yet knew she was lying in her bed.
The fancy held her that she had died,
And this was her soul in purgatory,
Until, one morning, two holy men
From the convent came, and laid at her side
The Bambino. Blessed Virgin! then
Nina looked up, and laughed, and wept,
And folded it close to her heart, and slept.

Slept such a soft, refreshing sleep,
That when she awoke her eyes had taken
The hyaline lustre, dewy, deep,
Of violets when they first awaken;
And the half-unravelled, fragile thread
Of life was knitted together again.
But she shrunk with sudden, speechless pain,
And seemed to droop like a flower, the day
The Capuchins came, with solemn tread,
To carry the Miracle Child away!

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III

Ere spring in the heart of pansies burned,
Or the buttercup had loosed its gold,
Nina was busy as ever of old
With fireside cares; but was not the same,
For from the hour when she had turned
To clasp the Image the fathers brought
To her dying-bed, a single thought
Had taken possession of her brain:
A purpose, as steady as the flame
Of a lamp in some cathedral crypt,
Had lighted her on her bed of pain;
The thirst and the fever, they had slipped
Away like visions, but this had stayed —
To have the Bambino brought again,
To have it, and keep it for her own!
That was the secret dream which made
Life for her now — in the streets, alone,
At night, and morning, and when she prayed.

How should she wrest it from the hand
Of the jealous Church? How keep the Child?
Flee with it into some distant land —
Like mother Mary from Herod's ire?
Ah, well, she knew not; she only knew
It was written down in the Book of Fate

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That she should have her heart's desire,
And very soon now, for of late,
In a dream, the little thing had smiled
Up in her face, with one eye's blue
Peering from underneath her breast,
Which the baby fingers had softly pressed
Aside, to look at her! Holy one!
But that should happen ere all was done.

Lying dark in the woman's mind —
Unknown, like a seed in fallow ground —
Was the germ of a plan, confused and blind
At first, but which, as the weeks rolled round,
Reached light, and flowered — a subtile flower,
Deadly as nightshade. In that same hour
She sought the husband and said to him,
With crafty tenderness in her eyes
And treacherous archings of her brows,
"Filippo mio, thou lov'st me well?
Truly? Then get thee to the house
Of the long-haired Jew Ben Raphaim —
Seller of curious tapestries,
(Ah, he hath everything to sell!)
The cunning carver of images —
And bid him to carve thee to the life
A *bambinetto* like that they gave
In my arms, to hold me from the grave
When the fever pierced me like a knife.
Perhaps, if we set the image there

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By the Cross, the saints would hear the prayer
Which in all these years they have not heard."

Then the husband went, without a word,
To the crowded Ghetto; for since the days
Of Nina's illness the man had been
A tender husband — with lover's ways
Striving, as best he might, to wean
The wife from her sadness, and to bring
Back to the home whence it had fled
The happiness of that laughing spring
When they, like a pair of birds, had wed.

The image! It was a woman's whim —
They were full of whims. But what to him
Were a dozen pieces of silver spent,
If it made her happy? And so he went
To the house of the Jew Ben Raphaim.
And the carver heard, and bowed, and smiled,
And fell to work as if he had known
The thought that lay in the woman's brain,
And somehow taken it for his own:
For even before the month was flown
He had carved a figure so like the Child
Of Ara-Cœli, you 'd not have told,
Had both been decked with jewel and chain
And dressed alike in a dress of gold,
Which was the true one of the twain.

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When Nina beheld it first, her heart
Stood still with wonder. The skilful Jew
Had given the eyes the tender blue,
And the cheeks the delicate olive hue,
And the form almost the curve and line
Of the Image the good Apostle made
Immortal with his miraculous art,
What time the sculptor[1] dreamed in the shade
Under the skies of Palestine.
The bright new coins that clinked in the palm
Of the carver in wood were blurred and dim
Compared with the eyes that looked at him
From the low sweet brows, so seeming calm;
Then he went his way, and her joy broke free,
And Filippo smiled to hear Nina sing
In the old, old fashion — carolling
Like a very thrush, with many a trill
And long-drawn, flute-like, honeyed note,
Till the birds in the farthest mulberry,
Each outstretching its amber bill,
Answered her with melodious throat.

Thus sped two days; but on the third
Her singing ceased, and there came a change
As of death on Nina; her talk grew strange,

[1] According to a monastic legend, the *Santissimo Bambino* was carved by a pilgrim, out of a tree which grew on the Mount of Olives, and painted by St. Luke while the pilgrim was sleeping over his work.

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Then she sunk in a trance, nor spoke nor stirred;
And the husband, wringing his hands dismayed,
Watched by the bed; but she breathed no word
That night, nor until the morning broke,
When she roused from the spell, and feebly laid
Her hand on Filippo's arm, and spoke:
"Quickly, Filippo! get thee gone
To the holy fathers, and beg them send
The Bambino hither" — her cheeks were wan
And her eyes like coals — "Oh, go, my friend,
Or all is said!" Through the morning's gray
Filippo hurried, like one distraught,
To the monks, and told his tale; and they,
Straight after matins, came and brought
The Miracle Child, and went their way.

Once more in her arms was the Infant laid,
After these weary months, once more!
Yet the woman seemed like a thing of stone
While the dark-robed fathers knelt and prayed;
But the instant the holy friars were gone
She arose, and took the broidered gown
From the Baby Christ, and the yellow crown
And the votive brooches and rings it wore,
Till the little figure, so gay before
In its princely apparel, stood as bare
As your ungloved hand. With tenderest care,
At her feet, 'twixt blanket and counterpane,
She hid the Babe; and then, reaching down

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To the coffer wherein the thing had lain,
Drew forth Ben Raphaim's manikin
In haste, and dressed it in robe and crown,
With lace and bauble and diamond-pin.
This finished, she turned to stone again,
And lay as one would have thought quite dead
If it had not been for a spot of red
Upon either cheek. At the close of day
The Capuchins came, with solemn tread,
And carried the false bambino away!

Over the vast Campagna's plain,
At sunset, a wind began to blow
(From the Apennines it came, they say),
Softly at first, and then to grow —
As the twilight gathered and hurried by —
To a gale, with sudden tumultuous rain
And thunder muttering far away.
When the night was come, from the blackened sky
The spear-tongued lightning slipped like a snake,
And the great clouds clashed, and seemed to shake
The earth to its centre. Then swept down
Such a storm as was never seen in Rome
By any one living in that day.
Not a soul dared venture from his home,
Not a soul in all the crowded town.
Dumb beasts dropped dead, with terror, in stall;
Great chimney-stacks were overthrown,

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And about the streets the tiles were blown
Like leaves in autumn. A fearful night,
With ominous voices in the air!
Indeed, it seemed like the end of all.
In the convent, the monks for very fright
Went not to bed, but each in his cell
Counted his beads by the taper's light,
Quaking to hear the dreadful sounds,
And shrivelling in the lightning's glare.
It was as if the rivers of Hell
Had risen, and overleaped their bounds.

In the midst of this, at the convent door,
Above the tempest's raving and roar
Came a sudden knocking! Mother of Grace,
What desperate wretch was forced to face
Such a night as that was out-of-doors?
Across the echoless, stony floors
Into the windy corridors
The monks came flocking, and down the stair,
Silently, glancing each at each,
As if they had lost the power of speech.
Yes — it was some one knocking there!
And then — strange thing! — untouched by a soul
The bell of the convent 'gan to toll!
It curdled the blood beneath their hair.
Reaching the court, the brothers stood
Huddled together, pallid and mute,
By the massive door of iron-clamped wood,

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Till one old monk, more resolute
Than the others — a man of pious will —
Stepped forth, and letting his lantern rest
On the pavement, crouched upon his breast
And peeped through a chink there was between
The cedar door and the sunken sill.
At the instant a flash of lightning came,
Seeming to wrap the world in flame.
He gave but a glance, and straight arose
With his face like a corpse's. What had he seen?
Two dripping, little pink-white toes!
Then, like a man gone suddenly wild,
He tugged at the bolts, flung down the chain,
And there, in the night and wind and rain —
Shivering, piteous, and forlorn,
And naked as ever it was born —
On the threshold stood the SAINTED CHILD!

"Since then," said Fra Gervasio,
"We have never let the Bambino go
Unwatched — no, not by a prince's bed.
Ah, signor, it made a dreadful stir."
"And the woman — Nina — what of her?
Had she no story?" He bowed his head,
And knitting his meagre fingers, so —
"In that night of wind and wrath," said he,
"There was wrought in Rome a mystery.
What know I, signor? They found her dead!"

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BAGATELLE

CORYDON

A PASTORAL

SCENE: *A roadside in Arcady*

SHEPHERD

Good sir, have you seen pass this way
A mischief straight from market-day?
You 'd know her at a glance, I think;
Her eyes are blue, her lips are pink;
She has a way of looking back
Over her shoulder, and, alack!
Who gets that look one time, good sir,
Has naught to do but follow her.

PILGRIM

I have not seen this maid, methinks,
Though she that passed had lips like pinks.

SHEPHERD

Or like two strawberries made one
By some sly trick of dew and sun.

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PILGRIM

A poet!

SHEPHERD

Nay, a simple swain
That tends his flock on yonder plain,
Naught else, I swear by book and bell.
But she that passed — you marked her well.
Was she not smooth as any be
That dwell herein in Arcady?

PILGRIM

Her skin was as the satin bark
Of birches.

SHEPHERD

Light or dark?

PILGRIM

Quite dark.

SHEPHERD

Then 't was not she.

PILGRIM

The peach's side
That gets the sun is not so dyed
As was her cheek. Her hair hung down

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Like summer twilight falling brown;
And when the breeze swept by, I wist
Her face was in a sombre mist.

SHEPHERD

No, that is not the maid I seek.
Her hair lies gold against the cheek;
Her yellow tresses take the morn
Like silken tassels of the corn.
And yet — brown locks are far from bad.

PILGRIM

Now I bethink me, this one had
A figure like the willow-tree
Which, slight and supple, wondrously
Inclines to droop with pensive grace,
And still retains its proper place;
A foot so arched and very small
The marvel was she walked at all;
Her hand — in sooth I lack for words —
Her hand, five slender snow-white birds;
Her voice — though she but said "God-speed" —
Was melody blown through a reed;
The girl Pan changed into a pipe
Had not a note so full and ripe.
And then her eye — my lad, her eye!
Discreet, inviting, candid, shy,

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An outward ice, an inward fire,
And lashes to the heart's desire —
Soft fringes blacker than the sloe.

SHEPHERD, *thoughtfully*

Good sir, which way did *this* one go?

. . . . . .

PILGRIM, *solus*

So, he is off! The silly youth
Knoweth not Love in sober sooth.
He loves — thus lads at first are blind —
No woman, only Womankind.

ON AN INTAGLIO HEAD OF MINERVA

Beneath the warrior's helm, behold
The flowing tresses of the woman!
Minerva, Pallas, what you will —
A winsome creature, Greek or Roman.

Minerva? No! 'tis some sly minx
In cousin's helmet masquerading;
If not — then Wisdom was a dame
For sonnets and for serenading!

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I thought the goddess cold, austere,
Not made for love's despairs and blisses:
Did Pallas wear her hair like that?
Was Wisdom's mouth so shaped for kisses?

The Nightingale should be her bird,
And not the Owl, big-eyed and solemn:
How very fresh she looks, and yet
She 's older far than Trajan's Column!

The magic hand that carved this face,
And set this vine-work round it running,
Perhaps ere mighty Phidias wrought
Had lost its subtle skill and cunning.

Who was he? Was he glad or sad,
Who knew to carve in such a fashion?
Perchance he graved the dainty head
For some brown girl that scorned his passion.

Perchance, in some still garden-place,
Where neither fount nor tree to-day is,
He flung the jewel at the feet
Of Phryne, or perhaps 't was Laïs.

But he is dust; we may not know
His happy or unhappy story:
Nameless, and dead these centuries,
His work outlives him — there 's his glory!

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Both man and jewel lay in earth
  Beneath a lava-buried city;
The countless summers came and went
  With neither haste, nor hate, nor pity.

Years blotted out the man, but left
  The jewel fresh as any blossom,
Till some Visconti dug it up —
  To rise and fall on Mabel's bosom!

O nameless brother! see how Time
  Your gracious handiwork has guarded:
See how your loving, patient art
  Has come, at last, to be rewarded.

Who would not suffer slights of men,
  And pangs of hopeless passion also,
To have his carven agate-stone
  On such a bosom rise and fall so!

THE MENU

I BEG you come to-night and dine.
A welcome waits you, and sound wine —
The Roederer chilly to a charm,
As Juno's breath the claret warm,
The sherry of an ancient brand.

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No Persian pomp, you understand—
A soup, a fish, two meats, and then
A salad fit for aldermen
(When aldermen, alas the days!
Were really worth their *mayonnaise*);
A dish of grapes whose clusters won
Their bronze in Carolinian sun;
Next, cheese—for you the Neufchâtel,
A bit of Cheshire likes me well;
Café au lait or coffee black,
With Kirsch or Kümmel or Cognac
(The German band in Irving Place
By this time purple in the face);
Cigars and pipes. These being through,
Friends shall drop in, a very few—
Shakespeare and Milton, and no more.
When these are guests I bolt the door,
With Not at Home to any one
Excepting Alfred Tennyson.

COMEDY

They parted, with clasps of hand,
And kisses, and burning tears.
They met, in a foreign land,
After some twenty years:

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Met as acquaintances meet,
Smilingly, tranquil-eyed —
Not even the least little beat
Of the heart, upon either side!

They chatted of this and that,
The nothings that make up life;
She in a Gainsborough hat,
And he in black for his wife.

IN AN ATELIER

I PRAY you, do not turn your head;
And let your hands lie folded, so.
It was a dress like this, wine-red,
That troubled Dante, long ago.
You don't know Dante? Never mind.
He loved a lady wondrous fair —
His model? Something of the kind.
I wonder if she had your hair!

I wonder if she looked so meek,
And was not meek at all (my dear,
I want that side light on your cheek).
He loved her, it is very clear,
And painted her, as I paint you,
But rather better, on the whole

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(Depress your chin; yes, that will do):
He was a painter of the soul!

(And painted portraits, too, I think,
In the INFERNO — devilish good!
I 'd make some certain critics blink
Had I his method and his mood.)
Her name was (Fanny, let your glance
Rest there, by that majolica tray) —
Was Beatrice; they met by chance —
They met by chance, the usual way.

(As you and I met, months ago,
Do you remember? How your feet
Went crinkle-crinkle on the snow
Along the bleak gas-lighted street!
An instant in the drug-store's glare
You stood as in a golden frame,
And then I swore it, then and there,
To hand your sweetness down to fame.)

They met, and loved, and never wed
(All this was long before our time),
And though they died, they are not dead —
Such endless youth gives mortal rhyme!
Still walks the earth, with haughty mien,
Pale Dante, in his soul's distress;
And still the lovely Florentine
Goes lovely in her wine-red dress.

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You do not understand at all?
He was a poet; on his page
He drew her; and, though kingdoms fall,
This lady lives from age to age.
A poet — that means painter too,
For words are colors, rightly laid;
And they outlast our brightest hue,
For varnish cracks and crimsons fade.

The poets — they are lucky ones!
When *we* are thrust upon the shelves,
Our works turn into skeletons
Almost as quickly as ourselves;
For our poor canvas peels at length,
At length is prized — when all is bare:
"What grace!" the critics cry, "what strength!"
When neither strength nor grace is there.

Ah, Fanny, I am sick at heart,
It is so little one can do;
We talk our jargon — live for Art!
I'd much prefer to live for you.
How dull and lifeless colors are!
You smile, and all my picture lies:
I wish that I could crush a star
To make a pigment for your eyes.

Yes, child, I know, I'm out of tune;
The light is bad; the sky is gray:

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I paint no more this afternoon,
So lay your royal gear away.
Besides, you 're moody — chin on hand —
I know not what — not in the vein —
Not like Anne Bullen, sweet and bland:
You sit there smiling in disdain.

Not like the Tudor's radiant Queen,
Unconscious of the coming woe,
But rather as she might have been,
Preparing for the headsman's blow.
So, I have put you in a miff —
Sitting bolt-upright, wrist on wrist.
How *should* you look? Why, dear, as if —
Somehow — as if you 'd just been kissed!

AT A READING

The spare Professor, grave and bald,
Began his paper. It was called,
I think, "A brief Historic Glance
At Russia, Germany, and France."
A glance, but to my best belief
'T was almost anything but brief —
A wide survey, in which the earth
Was seen before mankind had birth;

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Strange monsters basked them in the sun,
Behemoth, armored glyptodon,
And in the dawn's unpractised ray
The transient dodo winged its way;
Then, by degrees, through silt and slough,
We reached Berlin — I don't know how.
The good Professor's monotone
Had turned me into senseless stone
Instanter, but that near me sat
Hypatia in her new spring hat,
Blue-eyed, intent, with lips whose bloom
Lighted the heavy-curtained room.
Hypatia — ah, what lovely things
Are fashioned out of eighteen springs!
At first, in sums of this amount,
The blighting winters do not count.
Just as my eyes were growing dim
With heaviness, I saw that slim,
Erect, elastic figure there,
Like a pond-lily taking air.
She looked so fresh, so wise, so neat,
So altogether crisp and sweet,
I quite forgot what Bismarck said,
And why the Emperor shook his head,
And how it was Von Moltke's frown
Cost France another frontier town.
The only facts I took away
From the Professor's theme that day

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Were these: a forehead broad and low,
Such as the antique sculptures show;
A chin to Greek perfection true;
Eyes of Astarte's tender blue;
A high complexion without fleck
Or flaw, and curls about her neck.

AMONTILLADO

(In a rhythm of Mr. Thackeray)

Rafters black with smoke,
White with sand the floor is,
Twenty whiskered Dons
Calling to Dolores —
Tawny flower of Spain,
Wild rose of Granada,
Keeper of the wines
In this old posada.

Hither, light-of-foot,
Dolores — Juno — Circe!
Pretty Spanish girl
Without a grain of mercy!
Here I 'm travel-worn,
Sad, and thirsty very,

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And she does not fetch
The Amontillado sherry!

Thank you, breath of June!
Now my heart beats free; ah,
Kisses for your hand,
Mariquita mia.
You shall live in song,
Warm and ripe and cheery,
Mellowing with years
Like Amontillado sherry.

While the earth spins round
And the stars lean over,
May this amber sprite
Never lack a lover.
Blessèd be the man
Who lured her from the berry,
And blest the girl that brings
The Amontillado sherry!

Sorrow, get thee hence!
Care, be gone, blue dragon!
Only shapes of joy
Are sculptured on the flagon.
Kisses — repartees —
Lyrics — all that 's merry
Rise to touch the lip
In Amontillado sherry.

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Here be wit and mirth,
  And love, the arch enchanter;
Here the golden blood
  Of saints in this decanter.
When pale Charon comes
  To row me o'er his ferry,
I 'll fee him with a case
  Of Amontillado sherry!

What! the flagon 's dry?
  Hark, old Time's confession —
Both hands crossed at XII,
  Owning his transgression!
Pray, old monk, for all
  Generous souls and merry;
May they have their share
  Of Amontillado sherry!

CARPE DIEM

By studying my lady's eyes
I 've grown so learnèd day by day,
So Machiavelian in this wise,
That when I send her flowers, I say

To each small flower (no matter what,
Geranium, pink, or tuberose,

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Syringa, or forget-me-not,
Or violet) before it goes:

"Be not triumphant, little flower,
When on her haughty heart you lie,
But modestly enjoy your hour:
She 'll weary of you by and by."

DANS LA BOHÈME

THE leafless branches snap with cold;
The night is still, the winds are laid;
And you are sitting, as of old,
Beside my hearth-stone, heavenly maid!
What would have chanced me all these years,
As boy and man, had you not come
And brought me gifts of smiles and tears
From your Olympian home?

Dear Muse, 't is twenty years or more
Since that enchanted, fairy time
When you came tapping at my door,
Your reticule stuffed full of rhyme.
What strange things have befallen, indeed,
Since then! Who has the time to say
What bards have flowered (and gone to seed) —
Immortal for a day!

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We 've seen Pretence with cross and crown,
And Folly caught in self-spun toils;
Merit content to pass unknown,
And Honor scorning public spoils —
Seen Bottom wield the critic's pen
While Ariel sang in sunlit cloud:
Sometimes we wept, and now and then
We could but laugh aloud.

With pilgrim staff and sandal-shoon,
One time we sought the Old-World shrines:
Saw Venice lying in the moon,
The Jungfrau and the Apennines;
Beheld the Tiber rolling dark,
Rent temples, fanes, and gods austere;
In English meadows heard the lark
That charmed her Shakespeare's ear.

What dreams and visions we have had,
What tempests we have weathered through!
Been rich and poor, and gay and sad,
But never hopeless — thanks to you.
A draught of water from the brook,
Or *alt Hochheimer* — it was one;
Whatever fortune fell we took,
Children of shade and sun.

Though lacking gold, we never stooped
To pick it up in all our days;

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Though lacking praise we sometimes drooped,
We never asked a soul for praise.
The exquisite reward of song
Was song — the self-same thrill and glow
That to unfolding flowers belong
And woodland thrushes know!

What gilt-winged hopes have taken flight,
And dropped, like Icarus, in mid-sky!
What cloudy days have turned to bright!
What fateful years have glided by!
What lips we loved vain memory seeks!
What hands are cold that once pressed ours!
What lashes rest upon the cheeks
Beneath the snows and flowers!

We would not wish them back again;
The way is rude from here to there:
For us, the short-lived joy and pain,
For them, the endless rest from care,
The crown, the palm, the deathless youth:
We would not wish them back — ah, no!
And as for us, dear Muse, in truth,
We 've but half way to go.

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THE LUNCH

A GOTHIC window, where a damask curtain
Made the blank daylight shadowy and uncertain;
A slab of rosewood on four eagle-talons
Held trimly up and neatly taught to balance;
A porcelain dish, o'er which in many a cluster
Black grapes hung down, dead-ripe and without lustre;
A melon cut in thin, delicious slices;
A cake that seemed mosaic-work in spices;
Two China cups with golden tulips sunny,
And rich inside with chocolate like honey;
And she and I the banquet-scene completing
With dreamy words, and fingers shyly meeting.

IMP OF DREAMS

I

IMP of Dreams, when she 's asleep,
To her snowy chamber creep,
And straight whisper in her ear
What, awake, she will not hear —
Imp of Dreams, when she 's asleep.

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II

Tell her, so she may repent,
That no rose withholds its scent,
That no bird that has a song
Hoards the music summer-long —
Tell her, so she may repent.

III

Tell her there 's naught else to do,
If to-morrow's skies be blue,
But to come, with civil speech,
And walk with me to Hampton Beach —
Tell her there 's naught else to do!
Tell her, so she may repent —
Imp of Dreams, when she 's asleep!

AN ELECTIVE COURSE

LINES FOUND AMONG THE PAPERS OF A HARVARD UNDERGRADUATE

THE bloom that lies on Hilda's cheek
Is all my Latin, all my Greek;
The only sciences I know
Are frowns that gloom and smiles that glow;

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Siberia and Italy
Lie in her sweet geography;
No scholarship have I but such
As teaches me to love her much.

Why should I strive to read the skies,
Who know the midnight of her eyes?
Why should I go so very far
To learn what heavenly bodies are?
Not Berenice's starry hair
With Hilda's tresses can compare;
Not Venus on a cloudless night,
Enslaving Science with her light,
Ever reveals so much as when
She stares and droops her lids again.

If Nature's secrets are forbidden
To mortals, she may keep them hidden.
Æons and æons we progressed
And did not let that break our rest;
Little we cared if Mars o'erhead
Were or were not inhabited;
Without the aid of Saturn's rings
Fair girls were wived in those far springs;
Warm lips met ours and conquered us
Or ere thou wert, Copernicus!

Graybeards, who seek to bridge the chasm
'Twixt man to-day and protoplasm,

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Who theorize and probe and gape,
And finally evolve an ape —
Yours is a harmless sort of cult,
If you are pleased with the result.
Some folks admit, with cynic grace,
That you have rather proved your case.
These dogmatists are so severe!
Enough for me that Hilda 's here,
Enough that, having long survived
Pre-Eveic forms, she *has* arrived —
An illustration the completest
Of the survival of the sweetest.

Linnæus, avaunt! I only care
To know what flower she wants to wear.
I leave it to the addle-pated
To guess how pinks originated,
As if it mattered! The chief thing
Is that we have them in the Spring,
And Hilda likes them. When they come,
I straightway send and purchase some.
The Origin of Plants — go to!
Their proper end *I* have in view.

The loveliest book that ever man
Looked into since the world began
Is Woman! As I turn those pages,
As fresh as in the primal ages,
As day by day I scan, perplexed,

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The ever subtly changing text,
I feel that I am slowly growing
To think no other work worth knowing.
And in my copy — there is none
So perfect as the one I own —
I find no thing set down but such
As teaches me to love it much.

PEPITA

Scarcely sixteen years old
  Is Pepita. (You understand,
  A breath of this sunny land
Turns green fruit into gold:

A maiden's conscious blood
  In the cheek of girlhood glows;
  A bud slips into a rose
Before it is quite a bud.)

And I in Seville — sedate,
  An American, with an eye
  For that strip of indigo sky
Half-glimpsed through a Moorish gate —

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I see her, sitting up there,
With tortoise-shell comb and fan;
Red-lipped, but a trifle wan,
Because of her coal-black hair;

And the hair a trifle dull,
Because of the eyes beneath,
And the radiance of her teeth
When her smile is at its full!

Against the balcony rail
She leans, and looks on the street;
Her lashes, long and discreet,
Shading her eyes like a veil.

Held by a silver dart,
The mantilla's delicate lace
Falls each side of her face
And crosswise over her heart.

This is Pepita — this
Her hour for taking her ease:
A lover under the trees
In the *calle* were not amiss!

Well, I must needs pass by,
With a furtive glance, be it said,
At the dusk Murillo head
And the Andalusian eye.

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Pepita

From a drawing by Humphrey Moore

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In the Plaza I hear the sounds
  Of guitar and castanet;
  Although it is early yet,
The dancers are on their rounds.

Softly the sunlight falls
  On the slim Giralda tower,
  That now peals forth the hour
O'er broken ramparts and walls.

Ah, what glory and gloom
  In this Arab-Spanish town!
  What masonry, golden-brown,
And hung with tendril and bloom!

Place of forgotten kings!—
  With fountains that never play,
  And gardens where day by day
The lonely cicada sings.

Traces are everywhere
  Of the dusky race that came,
  And passed, like a sudden flame,
Leaving their sighs in the air!

Taken with things like these,
  Pepita fades out of my mind:
  Pleasure enough I find
In Moorish column and frieze.

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And yet I have my fears,
If this had been long ago,
I might . . . well, I do not know . . .
She with her sixteen years!

L'EAU DORMANTE

CURLED up and sitting on her feet,
Within the window's deep embrasure,
Is Lydia; and across the street,
A lad, with eyes of roguish azure,
Watches her buried in her book.
In vain he tries to win a look,
And from the trellis over there
Blows sundry kisses through the air,
Which miss the mark, and fall unseen,
Uncared for. Lydia is thirteen.

My lad, if you, without abuse,
Will take advice from one who 's wiser,
And put his wisdom to more use
Than ever yet did your adviser;
If you will let, as none will do,
Another's heartbreak serve for two,
You 'll have a care, some four years hence,

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How you lounge there by yonder fence
And blow those kisses through that screen —
For Lydia will be seventeen.

ECHO SONG

WHO can say where Echo dwells?
In some mountain-cave, methinks,
Where the white owl sits and blinks;
Or in deep sequestered dells,
Where the foxglove hangs its bells,
Echo dwells.
Echo!
Echo!

Phantom of the crystal Air,
Daughter of sweet Mystery!
Here is one has need of thee;
Lead him to thy secret lair,
Myrtle brings he for thy hair —
Hear his prayer,
Echo!
Echo

Echo, lift thy drowsy head,
And repeat each charmèd word

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Thou must needs have overheard
Yestere'en, ere, rosy-red,
Daphne down the valley fled —
Words unsaid,
Echo!
Echo!

Breathe the vows she since denies!
She hath broken every vow;
What she would she would not now —
Thou didst hear her perjuries.
Whisper, whilst I shut my eyes,
Those sweet lies,
Echo!
Echo!

THALIA

A middle-aged lyrical poet is supposed to be taking final leave of the Muse of Comedy. She has brought him his hat and gloves, and is abstractedly picking a thread of gold hair from his coat sleeve as he begins to speak:

I SAY it under the rose —
oh, thanks! — yes, under the laurel,
We part lovers, not foes;
we are not going to quarrel.

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We have too long been friends
on foot and in gilded coaches,
Now that the whole thing ends,
to spoil our kiss with reproaches.

I leave you; my soul is wrung;
I pause, look back from the portal —
Ah, I no more am young,
and you, child, you are immortal!

Mine is the glacier's way,
yours is the blossom's weather —
When were December and May
known to be happy together?

Before my kisses grow tame,
before my moodiness grieve you,
While yet my heart is flame,
and I all lover, I leave you.

So, in the coming time,
when you count the rich years over,
Think of me in my prime,
and not as a white-haired lover,

Fretful, pierced with regret,
the wraith of a dead Desire
Thrumming a cracked spinet
by a slowly dying fire.

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When, at last, I am cold —
years hence, if the gods so will it —
Say, "He was true as gold,"
and wear a rose in your fillet!

Others, tender as I,
will come and sue for caresses,
Woo you, win you, and die —
mind you, a rose in your tresses!

Some Melpomene woo,
some hold Clio the nearest;
You, sweet Comedy — you
were ever sweetest and dearest!

Nay, it is time to go.
When writing your tragic sister
Say to that child of woe
how sorry I was I missed her.

Really, I cannot stay,
though "parting is such sweet sorrow" ...
Perhaps I will, on my way
down-town, look in to-morrow!

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PALINODE

WHO is Lydia, pray, and who
Is Hypatia? Softly, dear,
Let me breathe it in your ear —
They are you, and only you.
And those other nameless two
Walking in Arcadian air —
She that was so very fair?
She that had the twilight hair? —
They were you, dear, only you.
If I speak of night or day,
Grace of fern or bloom of grape,
Hanging cloud or fountain spray,
Gem or star or glistening dew,
Or of mythologic shape,
Psyche, Pyrrha, Daphne, say —
I mean you, dear, you, just you.

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MERCEDES

CHARACTERS

ACHILLE LOUVOIS	MERCEDES
LABOISSIÈRE	URSULA
PADRE JOSÉF	SERGEANT and SOLDIERS

Scene, SPAIN *Period*, 1810

ACT I

A detachment of French troops bivouacked on the edge of the forest of Covelleda — A sentinel is seen on the cliffs overhanging the camp — The guard is relieved in dumb show as the dialogue progresses — Louvois and Laboissière, wrapped in greatcoats, are seated by a smouldering fire of brushwood in the foreground — Starlight.

SCENE I

LOUVOIS, LABOISSIÈRE

LABOISSIÈRE

Louvois!

LOUVOIS, *starting from a reverie*

Eh? What is it? I must have slept.

LABOISSIÈRE

With eyes staring at nothing, like an Egyptian idol! This is not amusing. You are as gloomy to-night as an undertaker out of employment.

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LOUVOIS

Say, rather, an executioner who loathes his trade. No, I was not asleep. I cannot sleep with this business on my conscience.

LABOISSIÈRE

In affairs like this, conscience goes to the rear — with the sick and wounded.

LOUVOIS

One may be forgiven, or can forgive himself, many a cruel thing done in the heat of battle; but to steal upon a defenceless village, and in cold blood sabre old men, women, and children — that revolts me.

LABOISSIÈRE

What must be, must be.

LOUVOIS

Yes — the poor wretches.

LABOISSIÈRE

The orders are ——

LOUVOIS

Every soul!

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Mercedes

From a drawing by Edwin A. Abbey

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LABOISSIÈRE

They have brought it upon themselves, if that comforts them. Every defile in these infernal mountains bristles with carabines; every village gives shelter or warning to the guerrillas. The army is being decimated by assassination. It is the same ghastly story throughout Castile and Estremadura. After we have taken a town we lose more men than it cost us to storm it. I would rather look into the throat of a battery at forty paces than attempt to pass through certain streets in Madrid or Burgos after nightfall. You go in at one end, but, *diantre!* you don't come out at the other.

LOUVOIS

What would you have? It is life or death with these people.

LABOISSIÈRE

I would have them fight like Christians. Poisoning wells and water-courses is not fighting, and assassination is not war. Some such blow as we are about to strike is the sort of rude surgery the case demands.

LOUVOIS

Certainly the French army on the Peninsula is in a desperate strait. The men are worn out contend-

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ing against shadows, and disheartened by victories that prove more disastrous than defeats in other lands.

LABOISSIÈRE

It is the devil's own country. The very birds here have no song.[1] Even the cigars are damnable. Will you have one?

LOUVOIS

Thanks, no.

LABOISSIÈRE, *after a pause*

This village of Arguano which we are to discipline, as the brave Junot would say, is it much of a village?

LOUVOIS

No; an insignificant hamlet — one wide *calle* with a zigzag line of stucco houses on each side; a *posada*, and a forlorn chapel standing like an overgrown tombstone in the middle of the cemetery. In the market-place, three withered olive-trees. On a hilltop overlooking all, a windmill of the time of Don Quixote. In brief, the regulation Spanish village.

[1] Except in a few provinces, singing-birds are rare in Spain, owing to the absence of woodland.

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LABOISSIÈRE

You have been there, then? — with your three withered olive-trees!

LOUVOIS, *slowly*

Yes, I have been there . . .

LABOISSIÈRE, *aside*

He has that same odd look in his eyes which has puzzled me these two days. (*Aloud*) If I have touched a wrong chord, pardon! You have unpleasant associations with the place.

LOUVOIS

I? Oh no; on the contrary I have none but agreeable memories of Arguano. I was quartered there, or rather, in the neighborhood, for several weeks a year or two ago. I was recovering from a wound at the time, and the air of that valley did me better service than a platoon of surgeons. Then the villagers were simple, honest folk — for Spaniards. Indeed, they were kindly folk. I remember the old padre; he was not half a bad fellow, though I have no love for the long-gowns. With his scant black soutane, and his thin white hair brushed behind his ears under a skull-cap, he somehow reminded me of my old mother in Languedoc, and we were good comrades. We used now and then to empty a bottle of Valdepeñas to-

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gether in the shady posada garden. The native wine here, when you get it pure, is better than it promises.

LABOISSIÈRE

Why, that was consorting with the enemy! The Church is our deadliest foe now. Since the bull of Pius VII., excommunicating the Emperor, we all are heretical dogs in Spanish eyes. His Holiness has made murder a short cut to heaven.[1] By poniarding or poisoning a Frenchman, these fanatics fancy that they insure their infinitesimal souls.

LOUVOIS *rises*

Yes, they believe that; yet when all is said, I have no great thirst for this poor padre's blood. If the maréchal had only turned over to me some other village! No — I do not mean what I say.

[1] In Andalusia, and in fact throughout Spain at that period, the priests taught the children a catechism of which this is a specimen: "How many Emperors of the French are there?" "One actually, in three deceiving persons." — "What are they called?" "Napoleon, Murat, and Manuel Godoy, Prince of the Peace." — "Which is the most wicked?" "They are all equally so." — "What are the French?" "Apostate Christians turned heretics." — "What punishment does a Spaniard deserve who fails in his duty?" "The death and infamy of a traitor." — "Is it a sin to kill a Frenchman?" "No, my father; heaven is gained by killing one of these heretical dogs."

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Since the work was to be done, it was better I should do it. There 's a fatality in sending me to Arguano. Remember that. From the moment the order came from headquarters I have had such a heaviness here. (*Pauses*) Awhile ago, in a half doze, I dreamed of cutting down this harmless old priest who had come to me to beg mercy for the women and children. I cut him across the face, Laboissière! I saw him still smiling, with his lip slashed in two. The irony of it! When I think of that smile I am tempted to break my sword over my knee, and throw myself into the ravine yonder.

LABOISSIÈRE, *aside*

This is the man who got the cross for sabring three gunners in the trench at Saragossa! It is droll he should be so moved by the idea of killing a beggarly old Jesuit more or less. (*Aloud*) Bah! it was only a dream, *voilà tout* — one of those villainous nightmares which run wild over these hills. I have been kicked by them myself many a time. What, the devil! dreams always go by contraries; in which case you will have the satisfaction of being knocked on the head by the venerable padre — and so quits. It may come to that. Who knows? We are surrounded by spies; I would wager a week's rations that Arguano is prepared for us.

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LOUVOIS

If I thought that! An assault with resistance would cover all. Yes, yes — the spies. They must be aware of our destination and purpose. A movement such as this could not have been made unobserved. (*Abruptly*) Laboissière!

LABOISSIÈRE

Well?

LOUVOIS

There was a certain girl at Arguano, a niece or god-daughter to the old padre — a brave girl.

LABOISSIÈRE

Ah — so? Come now, confess, my captain, it was the *sobrina*, and not the old priest, you struck down in your dream.

LOUVOIS

Yes, that *was* it. How did you know?

LABOISSIÈRE

By instinct and observation. There is always a woman at the bottom of everything. You have only to go deep enough.

LOUVOIS

This girl troubles me. I was ordered from Ar-

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guano without an instant's warning — at midnight — between two breaths, as it were. Then communication with the place was cut off. . . . I have never heard word of her since.

LABOISSIÈRE

So? Did you love her?

LOUVOIS

I have not said that.

LABOISSIÈRE

Speak your thought, and say it. I ever loved a love-story, when it ran as clear as a trout-brook and had the right heart-leaps in it. With this wind sighing in the tree-tops, and these heavy stars drooping over us, it is the very place and hour for a bit of romance. Come, now.

LOUVOIS

It was all of a romance.

LABOISSIÈRE

I knew it! I will begin for you: You loved her.

LOUVOIS

Yes, I loved her. It was the good God that sent her to my bedside. She nursed me day and night. She brought me back to life. . . . I know not how

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it happened; the events have no sequence in my memory. I had been wounded; I dropped from the saddle as we entered the village, and was carried for dead into one of the huts. Then the fever took me. . . . Day after day I plunged from one black abyss into another, my wits quite gone. At odd intervals I was conscious of some one bending over me. Now it seemed to be a demon, and now a white-hooded sister of the Sacred Heart at Paris. Oftener it was that madonna above the altar in the old mosque at Cordova. Such strange fancies take men with gunshot wounds. One night I awoke in my senses, and there she sat, with her fathomless eyes fixed upon my face, like a statue of Pity. You know those narrow, melting eyes these women have, with a dash of Arab fire in them . . .

LABOISSIÈRE

Know them? Sacrebleu!

LOUVOIS

The first time I walked out, she led me by the hand, I was so very weak, like a little child learning to walk. It was spring, the skies were blue, the almonds were in blossom, the air was like wine. Great heaven! how beautiful and fresh the world was, as if God had just made it! From time to time I leaned upon her shoulder, not thinking of her. . . . Later I came to know her — a saint

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in disguise, a peasant-girl with the instincts of a duchess.

LABOISSIÈRE

They are always like that, saints and duchesses — by brevet! I fell in with her own sister at Barcelona. Look you — braids of purple-black hair and the complexion of a newly-minted napoleon. I forget her name. (*Knitting his brows*) Paquita . . . Mariquita? It was something-quita, but no matter.

LOUVOIS

How it all comes back to me! The wild foot-paths in the haunted forest of Covelleda; the broken Moorish water-tank, in the plaza, against which we leaned to watch the gypsy dances; the worn stone step of the cottage, where we sat of evenings with guitar and cigarette. What simple things make a man forget that his grave lies in front of him! (*Pauses*) There was a lover, a contrabandista, or something — a fellow who might have played the spadassin in one of Lope de Vega's cloak-and-dagger comedies. The gloom of the lad, fingering his stiletto-hilt! Presently she sent him to the right-about, him and his scowls — the poor devil. A certain Pedro Mendez.

LABOISSIÈRE

Oh, a very bad case!

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LOUVOIS

I would not have any hurt befall that girl, Laboissière!

LABOISSIÈRE

Surely.

LOUVOIS

And there's no human way to warn her of her danger!

LABOISSIÈRE

To warn her would be to warn the village — and defeat our end. However, no French messenger could reach the place alive.

LOUVOIS

And no other is possible. Now you understand my misery. I am ready to go mad.

LABOISSIÈRE

You take the thing too seriously. Nothing ever is so bad as it looks, except a Spanish *ragoût*. After all, it is not likely that a single soul is left in Arguano. The very leaves of this dismal forest are lips that whisper of our movements. The villagers have doubtless made off with that fine store of grain and aguardiente we so sorely stand in need of, and a score or two of the brigands are probably lying in wait for us in some narrow cañon.

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LOUVOIS

God will it so!

LABOISSIÈRE

Louvois, if the girl is at Arguano, not a hair of her head shall be harmed, though I am shot for it when we get back to Burgos!

LOUVOIS

You are a brave soul, Laboissière! Your words have lifted a weight from my bosom. Without your aid I should be powerless to save her.

LABOISSIÈRE

Are we not comrades, we who have fought side by side these six months, and lain together night after night with this blue arch for our tent-roof? Dismiss your anxiety. What is that Gascogne proverb?—"We suffer most from the ills that never happen." Let us get some rest; we have had a rude day. . . . See, the stars have doubled their pickets out there to the westward.

LOUVOIS

You are right; we should sleep. We march at daybreak. Good-night.

LABOISSIÈRE

Good-night, and *vivè la France!*

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LOUVOIS

Vive l'Empéreur!

LABOISSIÈRE *walks away humming*

"*Reposez-vous, bons chevaliers!*"

LOUVOIS, *looking after him*

There goes a light heart. But mine. mine is as heavy as lead.

Scene II

LYRICAL INTERLUDE

Soldiers' Song

While this is being sung behind the scenes the guard is relieved on the cliffs. Louvois wraps his cloak around him and falls into a troubled sleep.

The camp is hushed; the fires burn low;
Like ghosts the sentries come and go:
Now seen, now lost, upon the height
A keen drawn sabre glimmers white.
Swiftly the midnight steals away—
Reposez-vous, bons chevaliers!

Perchance into your dream shall come
Visions of love or thoughts of home;

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The furtive night wind, hurrying by,
Shall kiss away the half-breathed sigh,
And softly whispering, seem to say,
Reposez-vous, bons chevaliers!

Through star-lit dusk and shimmering dew
It is your lady comes to you!
Delphine, Lisette, Annette — who knows
By what sweet wayward name she goes?
Wrapped in white arms till break of day,
Reposez-vous, bons chevaliers!

In the course of the song the stage is gradually darkened and the scene changed.

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ACT II

Morning — The interior of a stone hut in Arguano — Through the door opening upon the calle are seen piles of Indian corn, sheaves of wheat, and loaves of bread partly consumed — Empty wine-skins are scattered here and there among the cinders — In one corner of the chamber, which is low-studded but spacious, an old woman is sitting in an arm-chair and crooning to herself — At the left, a settle stands against the wall — In the centre of the room a child lies asleep in a cradle — Mercedes — Padre Joséf entering abruptly.

Scene I

MERCEDES, PADRE JOSÉF, *then* URSULA

PADRE JOSÉF

Mercedes! daughter! are you mad to linger so?

MERCEDES

Nay, father, it is you who are mad to come back.

PADRE JOSÉF

We were nearly a mile from the village when I missed you and the child. I had stopped at your cottage and found no one. I thought you were with those who had started at sunrise.

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MERCEDES

Nay, I brought Chiquita here last night when I heard the French were coming.

PADRE JOSÉF

Quick, Mercedes! there is not an instant to waste.

MERCEDES

Then hasten, Padre Joséf, while there is yet time. *[Pushes him towards the door*

PADRE JOSÉF

And you, child?

MERCEDES

I shall stay.

PADRE JOSÉF

Listen to her, Sainted Virgin! she will stay, and the French bloodhounds at our very heels!

MERCEDES, *glancing at Ursula*

Could I leave old Ursula, and she not able to climb the mountain? Think you — my own flesh and blood!

PADRE JOSÉF

Ah, *cielo!* true. They have forgotten her, the cowards! and now it is too late. God willed it —

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santificado sea tu nombre! (*Hesitates*) Mercedes, Ursula is old — very old; the better part of her is already dead. See how she laughs and mumbles to herself, and knows naught of what is passing.

MERCEDES

The poor grandmother! she thinks it is a saint's day. [*Seats herself on the settle*

PADRE JOSÉF

What is life or death to her whose soul is otherwhere? What is a second more or less to the leaf that clings to a shrunken bough? But you, Mercedes, the long summer smiles for such as you. Think of yourself, think of Chiquita. Come with me, child, come!

URSULA

Ay, ay, go with the good padre, dear. There is dancing on the plaza. The gitanos are there, mayhap. I hear the music. I had ever an ear for tambourines and castanets. When I was a slip of a girl, I used to foot it with the best in the cachuca and the bolera. I was a merry jade, Mercedes — a merry jade. Wear your broidered garters, dear.

MERCEDES

She hears music. (*Listens*) No. Her mind wanders strangely to-day, now here, now there. The

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gray spirits are with her. (*To Ursula gently*) No, grandmother, I came to stay with you, I and Chiquita. [*Crosses over to Ursula*

PADRE JOSÉF

You are mad, Mercedes. They will murder you all.

MERCEDES

They will not have the heart to harm Chiquita, nor me, perchance, for her sake.

PADRE JOSÉF

They have no hearts, these Frenchmen. Ah, Mercedes, do you not know better than most that a Frenchman has no heart? [*Points to the cradle*

MERCEDES, *hastily*

I know nothing. I shall stay. Is life so sweet to me? Go, Padre Joséf. What could save you if they found you here? Not your priest's gown.

PADRE JOSÉF

You will follow, my daughter?

MERCEDES

No.

PADRE JOSÉF

I beseech you!

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MERCEDES

No.

PADRE JOSÉF

Then you are lost!

MERCEDES

Nay, padrino, God is everywhere. Have you not yourself said it? Lay your hands for a moment on my head, as you used to do when I was a little child, and go — go! *[Kneels*

PADRE JOSÉF

Thou wert ever a wilful girl, Mercedes.

MERCEDES

Oh, say not so; but quick — your blessing, quick!

PADRE JOSÉF

À Dios. . . .

He makes the sign of the cross on Mercedes' forehead, and slowly turns away. Mercedes rises, follows him to the door, and looks after him with tears in her eyes. Then she returns to the middle of the room, and sits on a low stool beside the cradle.

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Scene II

MERCEDES, URSULA

URSULA, *after a silence*

Has he gone, the good padre?

MERCEDES

Yes, dear soul.

URSULA, *reflectively*

He was your uncle once.

MERCEDES

Once? Yes, and always. How you speak!

URSULA

He is not gay any more, the good padre. He is getting old . . . getting old.

MERCEDES

To hear her! and she eighty years last San Miguel's day!

URSULA

What day is it?

MERCEDES, *laying one finger on her lips*

Hist! Chiquita is waking.

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URSULA, *querulously*

Hist? Nay, I will say my say in spite of all. Hist? God save us! who taught thee to say hist to thy elders? Ay, ay, who taught thee? . . . What day is it?

MERCEDES, *aside*

How sharp she is awhiles! (*Aloud*) Pardon, pardon! Here is little Chiquita, with both eyes wide open, to help me beg thy forgiveness. (*Bends over the cradle*) See, she has a smile for grandmother. . . . Ah, no, little one, I have no milk for thee; the trouble has taken it all. Nay, cry not, dainty, or that will break my heart.

URSULA

Sing to her, *nieta*. What is it you sing that always hushes her? 'T is gone from me.

MERCEDES

I know not.

URSULA

Bethink thee.

MERCEDES

I cannot. Ah — the rhyme of The Three Little White Teeth?

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URSULA, *clapping her hands*

Ay, ay, that is it!

MERCEDES *rocks the child, and sings*

Who is it opens her blue bright eye,
Bright as the sea and blue as the sky? —
Chiquita!
Who has the smile that comes and goes
Like sunshine over her mouth's red rose? —
Muchachita!

What is the softest laughter heard,
Gurgle of brook or trill of bird,
Chiquita?
Nay, 't is thy laughter makes the rill
Hush its voice and the bird be still,
Muchachita!

Ah, little flower-hand on my breast,
How it soothes me and gives me rest!
Chiquita!
What is the sweetest sight I know?
Three little white teeth in a row,
Three little white teeth in a row,
Muchachita!

As Mercedes finishes the song, a roll of drums is heard in the calle. At the first tap she starts and listens intently, then assumes a stolid air. The sound approaches the door and suddenly ceases.

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Scene III

LABOISSIÈRE, MERCEDES, *then* SOLDIERS

LABOISSIÈRE, *outside*

A sergeant and two men to follow me! (*Mutters*) Curse me if there is so much as a mouse left in the whole village. Not a drop of wine, and the bread burnt to a crisp — the *scélérats!* (*Appears at the threshold*) Hulloa! what is this? An old woman and a young one — an Andalusian by the arch of her instep and the length of her eyelashes! (*In Spanish*) Girl, what are you doing here?

MERCEDES, *in French*

Where should I be, monsieur?

LABOISSIÈRE

You speak French?

MERCEDES

Caramba! since you speak Spanish.

LABOISSIÈRE

It was out of politeness. But talk your own jargon — it is a language that turns to honey on the tongue of a pretty woman. (*Aside*) It was my luck to unearth the only woman in the place! The captain's white blackbird has flown, bag and baggage,

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thank Heaven! Poor Louvois, what a grim face he made over the empty nest! (*Aloud*) Your neighbors have gone. Why are you not with them?

MERCEDES, *pointing to Ursula*

It is my grandmother, señor; she is very old.

LABOISSIÈRE

So? You could not carry her off, and you remained?

MERCEDES

Precisely.

LABOISSIÈRE

That was like a brave girl. (*Touching his cap*) I salute valor whenever I meet it. Why have all the villagers fled?

MERCEDES

Did they wish to be massacred?

LABOISSIÈRE, *shrugging his shoulders*

And you?

MERCEDES

It would be too much glory for a hundred and eighty French soldiers to kill one poor peasant girl. And then to come so far!

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LABOISSIÈRE, *aside*

She knows our very numbers, the fox! How she shows her teeth!

MERCEDES

Besides, señor, one can die but once.

LABOISSIÈRE

That is often enough. — Why did your people waste the bread and wine?

MERCEDES

That yours might neither eat the one nor drink the other. We do not store food for our ene mies.

LABOISSIÈRE

They could not take away the provisions, so they destroyed them?

MERCEDES, *mockingly*

Nothing escapes you!

LABOISSIÈRE

Is that your child?

MERCEDES

Yes, the *hija* is mine.

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LABOISSIÈRE

Where is your husband — with the brigands yonder?

MERCEDES

My husband?

LABOISSIÈRE

Your lover, then.

MERCEDES

I have no lover. My husband is dead.

LABOISSIÈRE

I think you are lying now. He 's a guerrilla.

MERCEDES

If he were, I should not deny it. What Spanish woman would rest her cheek upon the bosom that has not a carabine pressed against it this day? It were better to be a soldier's widow than a coward's wife.

LABOISSIÈRE, *aside*

The little demon! But she is ravishing! She would have upset St. Anthony, this one — if he had belonged to the Second Chasseurs! What is to be done? Theoretically, I am to pass my sword through her body; practically, I shall make love

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to her in ten minutes more, though her readiness to become a widow is not altogether pleasing. (*Aloud*) Here, sergeant, go report this matter to the captain. He is in the posada at the farther end of the square.

Exit sergeant. Shouts of exultation and laughter are heard outside, and presently three or four soldiers enter, bearing hams and a skin of wine. Mercedes gives a start.

FIRST SOLDIER

Voilà, lieutenant!

LABOISSIÈRE

Where did you get that?

SECOND SOLDIER

In a cellar hard by, hidden under some rushes.

THIRD SOLDIER

There are five more skins of wine like this jolly fellow in his leather jacket. Pray order a division of the booty, my lieutenant, for we are as dry as herrings in a box.

LABOISSIÈRE

A moment, my braves. (*Looks at Mercedes significantly*) Woman, is that wine good?

MERCEDES

The vintage was poor this year, señor.

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LABOISSIÈRE

I mean — is that wine good for a Frenchman to drink?

MERCEDES

Why not, señor?

LABOISSIÈRE, *sternly*

Yes or no?

MERCEDES

Yes.

LABOISSIÈRE

Why was it not served like the rest, then?

MERCEDES

They hid a few skins, thinking to come back for it when you were gone. An ill thing does not last forever.

LABOISSIÈRE

Open it, some one, and fetch me a glass. (*To Mercedes*) You will drink this.

MERCEDES, *coldly*

When I am thirsty I drink.

LABOISSIÈRE

Pardieu! this time you shall drink because *I* am thirsty.

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MERCEDES

As you will. (*Empties the glass*) To the King.

LABOISSIÈRE

That was an impudent toast. I would have preferred the Emperor or even Godoy; but no matter — each after his kind. To whom will the small-bones drink?

MERCEDES

The child, señor?

LABOISSIÈRE

Yes, the child; she is pale and sickly-looking; a draught will do her no harm. All the same, she will grow up and make some man wretched.

MERCEDES

But, señor ——

LABOISSIÈRE

Do you hear?

MERCEDES

But Chiquita, señor — she is so little, only thirteen months old, and the wine is strong!

LABOISSIÈRE

She shall drink.

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MERCEDES

No, no!

LABOISSIÈRE

I have said it, sacré nom ——

MERCEDES

Give it me, then. (*Takes the glass and holds it to the child's lips*)

LABOISSIÈRE, *watching her closely*

Woman! your hand trembles.

MERCEDES

Nay, it is Chiquita swallows so fast. See! she has taken it all. Ah, señor, it is a sad thing to have no milk for the little one. Are you content?

LABOISSIÈRE

Yes; I now see that the men may quench their thirst without fear. One cannot be too cautious in this hospitable country! Fall to, my children; but first, a glass for your lieutenant. [*Drinks*

URSULA

Ay, ay, the young forget the old . . . forget the old.

LABOISSIÈRE, *laughing*

Why, the depraved old sorceress! But she is

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right. She should have her share. *Place aux dames!* A cup, somebody, for Madame la Diablesse!

MERCEDES, *aside*

José-Maria!

One of the men carries wine to Ursula. Mercedes sits on the stool beside the cradle, resting her forehead on her palms. Laboissière stretches himself on the settle. Several soldiers come in, and fill their canteens from the wine-skin. They stand in groups, talking in undertones among themselves.

URSULA *rises from her chair*

The drink has warmed me to the heart, Mercedes! Said I not there was dancing on the plaza? 'T is but a step from here. 'T would do these old eyes good to look once more upon the dancers. The music drags me yonder! (*Wanderingly*) Nay, take away your hands, Mercedes — a plague upon ye! [*Goes out*

LABOISSIÈRE *suddenly starts to his feet and dashes his glass on the floor*

The child! look at the child! What is the matter with it? It turns livid — it is dying! Comrades, we are poisoned!

MERCEDES *rises hastily and throws her mantilla over the cradle*

Yes, you are poisoned! *Al fuego — al fuego — todos al fuego!*[1] You to perdition, we to heaven!

[*The soldiers advance towards Mercedes*

[1] To the flames — to the flames — all of you to the flames!

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LABOISSIÈRE, *interposing*

Leave her to me! Quick, some of you, go warn the others! (*Unsheathes his sword*) I end where I ought to have begun.

MERCEDES, *tearing aside her necherchief*

Strike here, señor. . . .

LOUVOIS *enters, and halts between the two with a dazed expression; he glances from Laboissière to the woman, and catches his breath*

Mercedes!

LABOISSIÈRE

Louvois, we are dead men! Beware of her, she is a fiend! Kill her without a word! The drink already throttles me — I — I cannot breathe here.

[*Staggers out, followed wildly by the soldiers*

Scene IV

LOUVOIS, MERCEDES

LOUVOIS

What does he say?

MERCEDES

You heard him.

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LOUVOIS

His words have no sense. (*Advancing towards her*) Oh, why are you in this place, Mercedes?

MERCEDES, *recoiling*

I am here, señor ——

LOUVOIS

You call me señor — you shrink from me ——

MERCEDES

Because we Spaniards do not desert those who depend upon us.

LOUVOIS

Is that a reproach? Ah, cruel! Have you forgotten ——

MERCEDES

I have forgotten nothing. I have had cause to remember all. I remember, among the rest, that a certain wounded French officer was cared for in this village as if he had been one of our own people — and now he returns to massacre us.

LOUVOIS

Mercedes!

MERCEDES

I remember the morning, nearly two years ago,

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when Padre Joséf brought me your letter. You had stolen away in the night — like a deserter! Ah, that letter — how it pierced my heart, and yet bade me live! Because it was full of those smooth oaths which women love, I carried it in my bosom for a twelvemonth; then for another twelvemonth I carried it because I hoped to give it back to you. (*Takes a paper from her bosom*) See, señor, what slight things words are! (*Tears the paper into small pieces, which she scatters at his feet*)

LOUVOIS

Ah!

MERCEDES

Sometimes it comforted me to think that you were dead. Señor, 't is better to be dead than false — and you were false!

LOUVOIS

Not I, by all your saints and mine! It is you who have broken faith. I should be the last of men if I had deserted you. Why, even a dog has gratitude. How could I now look you in the face?

MERCEDES

'T was an ill day you first did so!

LOUVOIS

Listen to me!

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MERCEDES

Too many times I have listened. Nay, speak not; I might believe you!

LOUVOIS

If I do not speak the truth, despise me! Since I left Arguano I have been at Lisbon, Irun, Aranjuez, among the mountains — I know not where; but ever in some spot whence it was impossible to send you tidings. A wall of fire and steel shut me from you. Thrice I have had my letters brought back to me — with the bearers' blood upon them; thrice I have trusted to messengers whose treachery I now discover. For a chance bit of worthless gold they broke the seals, and wrecked our lives! Ah, Mercedes, when my silence troubled you, why did you not read the old letter again! If the words you had of mine lost their value, it was because they were like those jewels in the padre's story, which changed their color when the wearer proved unfaithful.

MERCEDES

Aquilles!

LOUVOIS

Though I could not come to you nor send to you, I never dreamed I was forgotten. I used to say to myself: "A week, a month, a year — what

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does it matter? That brown girl is as true as steel!" I think I bore a charmed life in those days; I grew to believe that neither sword nor bullet could touch me until I held you in my arms again. (*The girl stands with her hands crossed upon her bosom, and looks at him with a growing light in her eyes*) It was the day before yesterday that our brigade returned to Burgos — at last! at last! O love, my eyes were hungry for you! Then that dreadful order came. Arguano had been to me what Mecca is to the Mohammedan — a shrine to be reached through toil and thirst and death. Oh, what a grim freak it was of fate, that I should lead a column against Arguano — my shrine, my Holy Land!

Mercedes moves swiftly across the room, and kneeling on the flag-stones near Louvois's feet begins to pick up the fragments of the letter. He suddenly stoops and takes her by the wrists.

Mercedes!

MERCEDES

Ah, but I was so unhappy! Was I unhappy? I forget. (*Looks up in his face and laughs*) It is so very long ago! An instant of heaven would make one forget a century of hell! When I hear your voice, two years are as yesterday. It was not I, but some poor girl I used to know who was like to die for you. It was not I — I have never been anything but happy. Nay, I needs must weep a little for

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her, the days were so heavy to that poor girl. And when you go away again, as go you must ——

LOUVOIS

I shall take you with me, Mercedes. Do you understand? You are to go with me to Burgos. (*Aside*) What a blank look she wears! She does not seem to understand.

MERCEDES, *abstractedly*

With you to Burgos? I was there once, in the great cathedral, and saw the bishops in their golden robes, and all the jewelled windows ablaze in the sunset. But with you? Am I dreaming this? The very room has grown unfamiliar to me. The crucifix yonder, at which I have knelt a hundred times, was it always there? My head is full of unwonted visions. I think I hear music and the sounds of castanets, like poor old Ursula. Those cries in the calle — is it a merry-meeting? Ah! what a pain struck my heart then! O God! I had forgotten! (*Clutches his arm and pushes him from her*) Have you drunk wine this day?

LOUVOIS

Why, Mercedes, how strange you are!

MERCEDES

No, no! have you drunk wine?

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LOUVOIS

Well, yes, a cup without. What then? How white you are!

MERCEDES

Quick! let me look you in the face. I wish to tell you something. You loved me once . . . it was in May . . . your wound is quite well now? No, no, not that! All things slip from me. Chiquita — nay, hold me closer, I do not see you. Into the sunlight — into the sunlight!

LOUVOIS

She is fainting!

MERCEDES

I am dying — I am poisoned. The wine was drugged for the French. 'T was Pedro Mendez did it, who hated all Frenchmen because of you. I was desperate. Chiquita — there in the cradle — she is dead — and I —— [*Sinks down at his feet*

LOUVOIS, *stooping over her*

Mercedes! Mercedes!

After an interval a measured tramp is heard outside. A sergeant with a file of soldiers in disorder enters the hut.

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Scene V

SERGEANT *and* SOLDIERS

FIRST SOLDIER

Behold! he has killed the murderess.

SECOND SOLDIER

If she had but twenty lives now!

THIRD SOLDIER

That would not bring back the brave Laboissière and the rest.

SECOND SOLDIER

Sapristi, no! but it would give us life for life.

FOURTH SOLDIER

Miséricorde! are twenty——

SERGEANT

Hold your peace, all of you! (*Advances and salutes Louvois, who is half kneeling beside the body of the woman*) My captain! (*Aside*) He does not answer me. (*Lays his hand hurriedly on Louvois's shoulder and starts*) Silence, there! and stand uncovered. He is dying!

Curtain

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FOOTNOTES

A BOOK OF QUATRAINS

TO THE READER

READER, you must take this verse
As you take to wife a maiden
With her faults and virtues laden —
Both for better and for worse.

DAY AND NIGHT

DAY is a snow-white Dove of heaven
That from the East glad message brings:
Night is a stealthy, evil Raven,
Wrapped to the eyes in his black wings.

MAPLE LEAVES

OCTOBER turned my maple's leaves to gold;
The most are gone now; here and there one lingers:
Soon these will slip from out the twigs' weak hold,
Like coins between a dying miser's fingers.

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A CHILD'S GRAVE

A LITTLE mound with chipped headstone.
The grass, ah me! uncut about the sward,
Summer by summer left alone
With one white lily keeping watch and ward.

PESSIMIST AND OPTIMIST

THIS one sits shivering in Fortune's smile,
Taking his joy with bated, doubtful breath.
This other, gnawed by hunger, all the while
Laughs in the teeth of Death.

GRACE AND STRENGTH

MANOAH'S son, in his blind rage malign
Tumbling the temple down upon his foes,
Did no such feat as yonder delicate vine
That day by day untired holds up a rose.

FROM THE SPANISH

To him that hath, we are told,
Shall be given. Yes, by the Cross!
To the rich man fate sends gold,
To the poor man loss on loss.

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MASKS

BLACK Tragedy lets slip her grim disguise
And shows you laughing lips and roguish eyes;
But when, unmasked, gay Comedy appears,
How wan her cheeks are, and what heavy tears!

COQUETTE

OR light or dark, or short or tall,
She sets a springe to snare them all;
All 's one to her — above her fan
She 'd make sweet eyes at Caliban.

EPITAPHS

Honest Iago. When his breath was fled
Doubtless these words were carven at his head.
Such lying epitaphs are like a rose
That in unlovely earth takes root and grows.

POPULARITY

SUCH kings of shreds have wooed and won her,
Such crafty knaves her laurel owned,
It has become almost an honor
Not to be crowned.

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CIRCUMSTANCE

LINKED to a clod, harassed, and sad
With sordid cares, she knew not life was sweet
Who should have moved in marble halls, and had
Kings and crown-princes at her feet.

SPENDTHRIFT

THE fault's not mine, you understand:
God shaped my palm so I can hold
But little water in my hand
And not much gold.

THE TWO MASKS

I GAVE my heart its freedom to be gay
Or grave at will, when life was in its May;
So I have gone, a pilgrim through the years,
With more of laughter in my scrip than tears.

MYRTILLA

THIS is the difference, neither more nor less,
Between Medusa's and Myrtilla's face:
The former slays us with its awfulness,
The latter with its grace.

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ON HER BLUSHING

Now the red wins upon her cheek;
Now white with crimson closes
In desperate struggle — so to speak,
A War of Roses.

ON A VOLUME OF ANONYMOUS POEMS ENTITLED "A MASQUE OF POETS"

VAIN is the mask. Who cannot at desire
Name every Singer in the hidden choir?
That is a thin disguise which veils with care
The face, but lets the changeless heart lie bare.

THE DIFFERENCE

SOME weep because they part,
And languish broken-hearted,
And others — O my heart! —
Because they never parted.

ON READING ——

GREAT thoughts in crude, unshapely verse set forth,
Lose half their preciousness, and ever must.
Unless the diamond with its own rich dust
Be cut and polished, it seems little worth.

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THE ROSE

FIXED to her necklace, like another gem,
A rose she wore — the flower June made for her;
Fairer it looked than when upon the stem,
And must, indeed, have been much happier.

MOONRISE AT SEA

UP from the dark the moon begins to creep;
And now a pallid, haggard face lifts she
Above the water-line: thus from the deep
A drownèd body rises solemnly.

ROMEO AND JULIET

FROM mask to mask, amid the masquerade,
Young Passion went with challenging, soft breath:
Art Love? he whispered; *art thou Love, sweet maid?*
Then Love, with glittering eyelids, *I am Death.*

HOSPITALITY

WHEN friends are at your hearthside met,
Sweet courtesy has done its most
If you have made each guest forget
That he himself is not the host.

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HUMAN IGNORANCE

WHAT mortal knows
Whence come the tint and odor of the rose?
What probing deep
Has ever solved the mystery of sleep?

FROM EASTERN SOURCES

I

IN youth my hair was black as night,
My life as white as driven snow:
As white as snow my hair is now,
And that is black which once was white.

II

No wonder Hafiz wrote such verses, when
He had the bill of nightingale for pen;
Nor that his lyrics were divine
Whose only ink was tears and wine.

III

A poor dwarf's figure, looming through the dense
Mists of a mountain, seemed a shape immense,
On seeing which, a giant, in dismay,
Took to his heels and ran away.

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MEMORIES

Two things there are with Memory will abide,
Whatever else befall, while life flows by:
That soft cold hand-touch at the altar side;
The thrill that shook you at your child's first cry.

EVIL EASIER THAN GOOD

Ere half the good I planned to do
Was done, the short-breathed day was through.
Had my intents been dark instead of fair
I had done all, and still had time to spare.

FIREFLIES

See where at intervals the firefly's spark
Glimmers, and melts into the fragrant dark;
Gilds a leaf's edge one happy instant, then
Leaves darkness all a mystery again!

PROBLEM

So closely knit are mind and brain,
Such web and woof are soul and clay,
How is it, being rent in twain,
One part shall live, and one decay?

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ORIGINALITY

No bird has ever uttered note
That was not in some first bird's throat;
Since Eden's freshness and man's fall
No rose has been original.

KISMET

A GLANCE, a word — and joy or pain
Befalls; what was no more shall be.
How slight the links are in the chain
That binds us to our destiny!

A HINT FROM HERRICK

No slightest golden rhyme he wrote
That held not something men must quote;
Thus by design or chance did he
Drop anchors to posterity.

PESSIMISTIC POETS

I LITTLE read those poets who have made
A noble art a pessimistic trade,
And trained their Pegasus to draw a hearse
Through endless avenues of drooping verse.

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POINTS OF VIEW

Bonnet in hand, obsequious and discreet,
The butcher that served Shakespeare with his meat
Doubtless esteemed him little, as a man
Who knew not how the market prices ran.

THE GRAVE OF EDWIN BOOTH

In narrow space, with Booth, lie housed in death
Iago, Hamlet, Shylock, Lear, Macbeth.
If still they seem to walk the painted scene,
'T is but the ghosts of those that once have been.

QUITS

If my best wines mislike thy taste,
And my best service win thy frown,
Then tarry not, I bid thee haste;
There 's many another Inn in town.

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Edwin Booth's Grave, Mount Auburn

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June 7. 1893

In narrow space, with Booth, lie housed in death
Iago, Hamlet, Shylock, Lear, Macbeth.
If still they seem to walk the painted scene,
'Tis but the ghosts of those that once have been

Thomas Bailey Aldrich.

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JUDITH AND HOLOFERNES

BOOK I

JUDITH IN THE TOWER

UNHERALDED, like some tornado loosed
Out of the brooding hills, it came to pass
That Holofernes, the Assyrian,
With horse and foot a mighty multitude,
Crossed the Euphrates, ravaging the land
To Esdraëlon, and then hawk-like swooped
On Bethulîa: there his trenches drew,
There his grim engines of destruction set
And stormed the place; and gave them little rest
Within, till sad their plight was; for at last
The wells ran low, the stores of barley failed,
And famine crept on them. A wheaten loaf
Was put in this scale and the gold in that,
So scarce was bread. Now were the city streets
Grown loud with lamentation, women's moans
And cries of children; and one night there came
The plague, with breath as hot as the simoom
That blows the desert sand to flakes of fire.

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Yet Holofernes could not batter down
The gates of bronze, nor decent entrance make
With beam or catapult in those tough walls,
Nor with his lighted arrows fire the roofs.
Gnawing his lip, among the tents he strode —
Woe to the slave that stumbled in his path! —
And cursed the doting gods, who gave no aid,
But slumbered somewhere in their house of cloud.
Still wan-cheeked Famine and red-spotted Pest
Did their fell work; these twain were his allies.
So he withdrew his men a little way
Into the hill-land, where good water was,
And shade of trees that spread their forkèd boughs
Like a stag's antlers. There he pitched his tents
On the steep slope, and counted the slow hours,
Teaching his heart such patience as he knew.

At midnight, in that second month of siege,
Judith had climbed into a mouldered tower
That looked out on the vile Assyrian camp
Stretched on the slopes beyond an open plain.
Here did she come, of late, to think and pray.
Below her, where the spiral vapors rose,
The army like a witch's caldron seethed.
At times she heard the camels' gurgling moan,
The murmur of men's tongues, and clank of arms
Muffled by distance. Through the tree-stems shone
The scattered watchfires, lurid fiends of night

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That with red hands reached up and clutched the
dark;
And now and then as some mailed warrior strode
Into the light, she saw his armor gleam.
The city, with its pestilential breath,
A hive of woes, lay close beneath her feet;
Above her leaned the sleepless Pleiades.

That night she held long vigil in the tower,
Merari's daughter, dead Manasseh's wife,
Who, since the barley harvest when he died,
Had dwelt three years a widow in her house,
And looked on no man: where Manasseh slept
In his strait sepulchre, there slept her heart.
Yet dear to her, and for his memory dear,
Was Israel, the chosen people, now
How shorn of glory! Hither had she come
To pray in the still starlight, far from those
Who watched or wept in the sad world below;
And in the midnight, in the tower alone,
She knelt and prayed as one that doubted not:

"Oh, are we not Thy children who of old
Trod the Chaldean idols in the dust,
And built our altars only unto Thee?

"Didst Thou not lead us into Canaan
For love of us, because we spurned the gods?
Didst Thou not shield us that we worshipped Thee?

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"And when a famine covered all the land,
And drove us into Egypt, where the King
Did persecute Thy chosen to the death —

"Didst Thou not smite the swart Egyptians then,
And guide us through the bowels of the deep
That swallowed up their horsemen and their King?

"For saw we not, as in a wondrous dream,
The up-tossed javelins, the plunging steeds,
The chariots sinking in the wild Red Sea?

"O Lord, Thou hast been with us in our woe,
And from Thy bosom Thou hast cast us forth,
And to Thy bosom taken us again:

"For we have built our temples in the hills
By Sinai, and on Jordan's sacred banks,
And in Jerusalem we worship Thee.

"O Lord, look down and help us. Stretch Thy hand
And free Thy people. Make our faith as steel,
And draw us nearer, nearer unto Thee."

Then Judith loosed the hair about her brows,
About her brows the long black tresses loosed,
And bent her head, and wept for Israel.
And while she wept, bowed like a lotus flower

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That leans to its own shadow in the Nile,
A strangest silence fell upon the land;
Like to a sea-mist spreading east and west
It spread, and close on this there came a sound
Of snow-soft plumage rustling in the dark,
And voices that such magic whisperings made
As the sea makes at twilight on a strip
Of sand and pebble. Slowly from her knees
Judith arose, but dared not lift her eyes,
Awed with the sense that now beside her stood
A God's white Angel, though she saw him not,
While round the tower a wingèd retinue
In the wind's eddies drifted; then the world
Crumbled and vanished, and nought else she knew.
The Angel stooped, and from his luminous brow
And from the branch of amaranth he bore
A gleam fell on her, touching eyes and lips
With light ineffable, and she became
Fairer than morning in Arabia.
On cheek and brow and bosom lay such tint
As in the golden process of mid-June
Creeps up the slender stem to dye the rose.
Then silently the Presence spread his vans.
Like one that from a lethargy awakes
The Hebrew woman started: in the tower
No wingèd thing was, save on a crossbeam
A twittering sparrow; from the underworld
Came sounds of pawing hoof, and clink of steel;
And where the black horizon blackest lay

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A moment gone, a thread of purple ran
That changed to rose, and then to sudden gold.

And Judith stood bewildered, with flushed cheek
Pressed to the stone-work. When she knelt to pray
It was dead night, and now 't was break of dawn;
Yet had not sleep upon her eyelids set
Its purple seal. In this strange interval
Of void or trance, or slumber-mocking death,
What had befallen? As a skein of flax,
Dropped by a weaver seated at his loom,
Lies in a tangle, and but knots the more,
And slips the fingers seeking for the clue:
So all her thought lay tangled in her brain,
And what had chanced eluded memory.

Now was day risen; on the green foothills
Men were in motion, and such life as was
In the sad city dragged itself to light.
Then Judith turned, and slowly down the stair
Descended to the court. Outside the gate,
In the broad sun, lounged Achior, lately fled
From Holofernes; as she passed she spoke:
"The Lord be with thee, Achior, all thy days."
And Achior — captain of the Ammonites,
In exile, but befriended of the Jews —
Paused, and looked after her with pensive eyes.
Unknown of any one, these many months

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His corselet held a hopeless tender heart
For dead Manasseh's wife — too fair she was,
And rich — this day how wonderfully fair!
But she, unheedful, crossed the tile-paved court,
And passing through an archway reached the place
Where underneath an ancient aloe-tree
Sat Chabris with Ozias and his friend
Charmis, patriarchs of the leaguered town.

There Judith halted, and obeisance made
With hands crossed on her breast, as was most meet,
They being aged men and governors.
And as she bent before them where they sate,
They marvelled much that in that stricken town
Was one face left not hunger-pinched, or wan,
With grief's acquaintance: such was Judith's face.
And white-haired Charmis looked on her, and said:
"This woman walketh in the light of God."

"Would it were so!" said Judith. "I know not;
But this I know, that where faith is, is light.
Let us not doubt Him! If we doubt we die.
Oh, is it true, Ozias, thou hast mind
To yield the city to our enemies
After five days, unless the Lord shall stoop
From heaven to save us?"

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And Ozias said:
"Our young men perish on the battlements;
Our wives and children by the empty wells
Lie down and perish."

"If we doubt we die.
But whoso trusts in God, as Isaac did,
Though suffering greatly even to the end,
Dwells in a citadel upon a rock;
Wave shall not reach it, nor fire topple down."

"Our young men perish on the battlements,"
Answered Ozias; "by the dusty tanks,
Our wives and children."

"They shall go and dwell
With Seers and Prophets in eternal life.
Is there no God?"

"One only," Chabris spoke,
"But now His face is turned aside from us.
He sees not Israel."

"Is His mercy less
Than Holofernes'? Shall we place our trust
In this fierce bull of Asshur?"

"Five days more,"
Said old Ozias, "we shall trust in God."

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"Ah! His time is not man's time," Judith cried,
"And why should we, the dust beneath His feet,
Decide the hour of our deliverance,
Saying to Him: *Thus shalt Thou do, and so?*
Ozias, thou to whom the heart of man
Is as a scroll illegible, dost thou
Pretend to read the mystery of God?"

Then gray Ozias bowed his head, abashed,
And spoke not; but the white-haired Charmis spoke:
"The woman sayeth wisely. We are wrong
That in our anguish mock the Lord our God,
Staff that we rest on, stream whereat we drink!"
And then to Judith: "Child, what wouldst thou have?"

"I cannot answer thee, nor make it plain
In my own thought. This night I had a dream
Not born of sleep, for both my eyes were wide,
My sense alive — a vision, if thou wilt,
Of which the scattered fragments in my mind
Are as the fragments of a crystal vase
That, slipping from the slave-girl's careless hand,
Falls on the marble. No most cunning skill
Shall join the pieces and make whole the vase.
So with my vision. I seem still to hear
Strange voices round me, inarticulate —
Words shaped and uttered by invisible lips;

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At whiles there seems a palm close pressed to mine
That fain would lead me somewhere. I know not
What all portends. Some great event is near.
Last night celestial spirits were on wing
Over the city. As I sat alone
Within the tower, upon the stroke of twelve —
Look, look, Ozias! Charmis, Chabris, look!
See ye not, yonder, a white mailèd hand
That with its levelled finger points through air!"

The three old men, with lifted, startled eyes,
Turned, and beheld on the transparent void
A phantom hand in silver gauntlet clad
With stretched forefinger; and they spake no word,
But in the loose folds of their saffron robes
Their wan and meagre faces muffled up,
And sat there, like those statues which the wind
Near some old city on a desert's edge
Wraps to the brow in cerements of red dust.

After a silence Judith softly said:
"'T is gone! Fear not; it was a sign to me,
To me alone. Ozias, didst thou mark
The way it pointed? — to the Eastern Gate!
Send the guard orders not to stay me there.
O question not! I but obey the sign.
I must go hence. Before the shadows fall
Upon the courtyard thrice, I shall return,
Else shall men's eyes not look upon me more.
What darkness lies between this hour and that

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Tongue may not say. The thing I can I will,
Leaning on God, remembering what befell
Jacob in Syria when he fed the flocks
Of Laban, and how Isaac in his day,
And Abraham, were chastened by the Lord.
Wait thou in patience; till I come, keep thou
The sanctuaries." And the three gave oath
To hold the town; and if they held it not,
Then should she find them in the synagogue
Dead near the sacred ark; the spearmen dead
At the four gates; upon the battlements
The archers bleaching. "Be it so," she said,
"Yet be it not so! Shield me with thy prayers!"

Then Judith made obeisance as before,
Passed on, and left them pondering her words
And that weird spectre hand in silver mail,
Which, vanishing, had left a moth-like glow
Against the empty, unsubstantial air.
Still were their eyes fixed on it in mute awe.

When Judith gained her room in the dull court,
Where all the houses in the shadow lay
Of the great synagogue, she threw aside
The livery of grief, and in her hair
Braided a thread of opals, on her breasts
Poured precious ointment, and put on the robe
That in a chest of camphor-wood had lain
Unworn since she was wed — the rustling robe,
Heavy with vine-work, delicate flower and star,

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And looped at the brown shoulder with a pearl
To ransom princes. Had he seen her then,
The sad young captain of the Ammonites,
Had he by chance but seen her as she stood
Clasping her girdle, it had been despair!

Then Judith veiled her face, and took her scarf,
And wrapped the scarf about her, and went forth
Into the street with Marah, the handmaid.
It was the hour when all the wretched folk
Haunted the market-stalls to get such scraps
As famine left; the rich bazaars were closed,
Those of the cloth-merchants and jewellers;
But to the booths where aught to eat was had,
The starving crowds converged, vociferous.
Thus at that hour the narrow streets were thronged.
And as in summer when the bearded wheat,
With single impulse leaning all one way,
Follows the convolutions of the wind,
And parts to left or right, as the wind veers:
So went men's eyes with Judith, so the crowd
Parted to give her passage. On she pressed
Through noisome lanes where poverty made lair,
By stately marble porticos pressed on
To the East Gate, a grille of triple bronze,
That lifted at her word, and then shut down
With horrid clangor. The crude daylight there
Dazed her an instant; then she set her face
Towards Holofernes' camp in the hill-land.

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BOOK II

THE CAMP OF ASSHUR

O SADDENED Muse, sing not of that rough way
Her light feet trod among the flints and thorns,
Where some chance arrow might have stained her
breast,
And death lay coiled in the slim viper's haunt;
Nor how the hot sun tracked them till they reached,
She and her maid, a place of drooping boughs
Cooled by a spring set in a cup of moss,
And bathed their cheeks, and gathered mulberries,
And at the sudden crackling of a twig
Were wellnigh dead with fear: sing, rather, now
Of Holofernes, stretched before his tent
Upon the spotted hide of that wild beast
He slew beside the Ganges, he alone
With just his dagger; from the jungle there
The creature leapt on him, and tore his throat,
In the dim starlight: that same leopard skin
Went with him to all wars. This day he held
A council of the chiefs. Close at his feet
His iron helmet trailed on the sere grass
Its horsehair plume — a Hindu maiden's hair,

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Men whispered under breath; and from his lance,
The spear set firmly in the sun-scorched earth
Where he had thrust it, hung his massive shield.
Upon the shield a dragon was, with eyes
Of sea-green emeralds, which caught the light
And flashed it back, and seemed a thing that lived.

There lay the Prince of Asshur, with his chin
Propped on one hand, and the gaunt captains ranged
In groups about him; men from Kurdistan,
Men from the Indus, and the salt-sea dunes,
And those bleak snow-lands that to northward lie —
A motley conclave, now in hot debate
Whether to press the siege or wait the end.
And one said: "Lo! the fruit is ripe to fall,
Let us go pluck it; better to lie dead,
Each on his shield, than stay here with no grain
To feed the mares, and no bread left." "The moat
Is wide," said one, "and many are the spears,
And stout the gates. Have we not tried our men
Against the well-set edges of those spears?
Note how the ravens wheel in hungry files
Above the trenches, and straight disappear.
See where they rise, red-beaked and surfeited!
Has it availed? The city stands. Within
There 's that shall gnaw its heart out, if we wait,
And bide the sovran will of the wise gods."
Some of the younger captains made assent,
But others scowled, and mocked them, and one
cried:

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"Ye should have tarried by the river's bank
At home, and decked your hair with butterflies
Like the king's harlots. Little use are ye."
"Nay," cried another, "they did well to come;
They have their uses. When our meat is gone
We 'll even feed upon the tender flesh
Of these tame girls, who, though they dress in steel,
Like more the tremor of a cithern string
Than the shrill whistle of an arrowhead."

Death lay in lighter spoken words than these,
And quick hands sought the hilt, and spears were poised,
And they had one another slain outright,
These fiery lords, when suddenly each blade
Slipped back to sheath, and the pale captains stood
Transfixed, beholding in their very midst
A woman whose exceeding radiance
Of brow and bosom made her garments seem
Threadbare and lustreless, yet whose attire
Outshone the purples of a Persian queen
That decks her for some feast, or makes her rich
To welcome back from war her lord the king.

For Judith, who knew all the hillside paths
As one may know the delicate azure veins
That branch and cross on his belovèd's wrist,
Had passed the Tartar guards in the thick wood,
And gained the camp's edge, and there stayed her steps,

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Appalled at sight of all those angry lords,
But taking heart, had noiselessly approached,
And stood among them, unperceived till then.
Now on the air arose such murmurous sound
As when a swarm of honey-bees in June
Rises, and hangs mist-like above the hives,
And fills the air with its sweet monotone.
The Prince of Asshur knew not what it meant,
And springing to his feet, thrust back the chiefs
That hampered him, and cried in a loud voice:
"Who breaks upon our councils?" Then his eyes
Discovered Judith. As in a wild stretch
Of silt and barren rock, a gracious flower,
Born of the seed some bird of passage dropped,
Leans from the stem and with its beauty lights
The lonely waste, so Judith, standing there,
Seemed to illumine all the dismal camp,
And Holofernes' voice took softer tone:
"Whence comest thou — thy station, and thy name?"

"Merari's daughter, dead Manasseh's wife,
Judith. I come from yonder hapless town."

"Methought the phantom of some murdered queen
From the dead years had risen at my feet!
If these Samarian women are thus shaped,
O my brave Captains, let not one be slain! —

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What seekest thou within the hostile lines
Of Asshur?"

"Holofernes."

"This is he."

"O good my Lord," cried Judith, "if indeed
Thou art that Holofernes whom I seek,
And dread, in truth, to find, low at thy feet
Behold thy handmaid who in fear has flown
From a doomed people."

"If this thing be so,
Thou shalt have shelter of our tents, and food,
And meet observance, though our enemy.
Touching thy people, they with tears of blood,
And ashes on their heads, shall rue the hour
They brought not tribute to the lord of all,
The king at Nineveh. But thou shalt live."

"O good my lord," said Judith, "as thou wilt
So would thy servant. And I pray thee now
Let them that listen stand awhile aside,
For I have that for thine especial ear
Of import to thee."

Then the chiefs fell back
Under the trees, and leaned on their huge shields,

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Eyeing the Hebrew woman whose sweet looks
Brought them home-thoughts and visions of their wives
In that far land they might not see again.
And Judith spoke, and they strained ear to catch
Her words; but only the soft voice was theirs:

"My lord, if yet thou holdest in thy thought
The words which Achior the Ammonite
Once spake to thee concerning Israel,
O treasure them; no guile was in those words.
True is it, master, that our people kneel
To an unseen but not an unknown God:
By day and night He watches over us,
And while we worship Him we cannot fall,
Our tabernacles shall be unprofaned,
Our spears invincible; but if we sin,
If we transgress the law by which we live,
Our sanctuaries shall be desecrate,
Our tribes thrust forth into the wilderness,
Scourged and accursèd. Therefore, O my lord,
Seeing this nation wander from the faith
Taught of the Prophets, I have fled dismayed.
Heed, Holofernes, what I speak this day,
And if the thing I tell thee prove not true,
Let not thy falchion tarry in its sheath,
But seek my heart. Why should thy handmaid live,
Having deceived thee, thou the crown of men?"

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She spoke, and paused; and sweeter on his ear
Was Judith's voice than ever to him seemed
The silver laughter of the Assyrian girls
In the bazaars, or when in the cool night,
After the sultry heat of the long day,
They came down to the river with their lutes.
The ceaseless hum that rose from the near tents,
The neighing of the awful battle-steeds,
The winds that sifted through the fronded palms
He heard not; only Judith's voice he heard.

"O listen, Holofernes, my sweet lord,
And thou shalt rule not only Bethulia,
Rich with its hundred altars' crusted gold,
But Cades-Barne and Jerusalem,
And all the vast hill-land to the blue sea.
For I am come to give into thy hand
The key of Israel — Israel now no more,
Since she disowns the Prophets and her God."

"Speak, for I needs must listen to these things."

"Know then, O prince, it is our yearly use
To lay aside the first fruits of the grain,
And so much oil, so many skins of wine,
Which, being sanctified, are held intact
For the High Priests who serve before our Lord
In the great temple at Jerusalem.
This holy food — which even to touch is death —

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The rulers, sliding from their ancient faith,
Fain would lay hands on, being wellnigh starved;
And they have sent a runner to the Priests
(The Jew Abijah, who, at dead of night,
Shot like a javelin between thy guards),
Bearing a parchment begging that the Church
Yield them permit to eat the sacred corn.
But 't is not lawful they should do this thing,
Yet will they do it. Then shalt thou behold
The archers tumbling headlong from the walls,
Their strength gone from them; thou shalt see the spears
Splitting like reeds within the spearmen's hands,
And the strong captains tottering like old men
Stricken with palsy. Then, O mighty prince,
Then with thy trumpets blaring doleful dooms,
And thy proud banners waving in the wind,
With squares of men and eager clouds of horse
Thou shalt sweep down on them, and strike them dead!
But now, my lord, before this come to pass,
Three days must wane, for they touch not the food
Until the Jew Abijah shall return
With the Priests' message. Here among thy hosts,
O Holofernes, would I dwell the while,
Asking but this, that I and my handmaid
Each night, at the sixth hour, may egress havere
Unto the valley, there to weep and pray
That God forsake this nation in its sin.

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And as my prophecy prove true or false,
So be it with me."

Judith ceased, and stood
With hands crossed on her breast, and face upraised.
And Holofernes answered not at first,
But bent his eyes on the uplifted face,
And mused, and then made answer: "Be it so.
Thou shalt be free to go and come, and none
Shall stay thee, nor molest thee, these three days.
And if, O pearl of women, the event
Prove not a dwarf beside the prophecy,
Then hath the sun not looked upon thy like;
Thy name shall be as honey on men's lips,
And in their memory fragrant as a spice.
Music shall wait on thee; crowns shalt thou have,
And jewel chests of costly sandal-wood,
And robes in texture like the ring-dove's throat,
And milk-white mares, and slaves, and chariots
And thou shalt dwell with me in Nineveh,
In Nineveh, the City of the Gods."

Then on her cheek the ripe blood of her race
Faltered an instant. "Even as thou wilt
So would thy servant." Thereupon the slaves
Brought meat and wine, and placed them in a tent,
A green pavilion standing separate

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Hard by the brook, for Judith and her maid.
But Judith ate not, saying: "Master, no.
It is not lawful that we taste of these;
My maid has brought a pouch of parchèd corn,
And bread and figs and wine of our own land,
Which shall not fail us." Holofernes said,
"So let it be," and pushing back the screen
Passed out, and left them sitting in the tent.

And when they were alone within the tent,
"O Marah," cried the mistress, "do I dream?
Is this the dread Assyrian rumor paints,
He who upon the plains of Ragau smote
The hosts of King Arphaxad, and despoiled
Sidon and Tyrus, and left none unslain?
Gentle is he we thought so terrible,
Whose name we stilled unruly children with
At bedtime — *See! the Bull of Asshur comes!*
And all the little ones would straight to bed.
Is he not statured as should be a king?
Beside our tallest captain this grave prince
Towers like the palm above the olive-tree.
A gentle prince, with gracious words and ways."
And Marah said: "A gentle prince he is —
To look on; I misdoubt his ways and words."
"And I, O Marah, I would trust him not!"
And Judith laid her cheek upon her arm
With a quick laugh, and like to diamonds
Her white teeth shone between the parted lips.

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Now Holofernes held himself aloof
That day, spoke little with his chiefs, nor cared
To watch the athletes at their games of strength
Under the cedars, as his custom was,
But in a grove of clustered tamarisk trees
On the camp's outer limit walked alone,
Save for one face that haunted the blue air,
Save for one voice that murmured at his ear.
There, till the twilight flooded the low lands
And the stars came, these kept him company.

The word of Judith's beauty had spread wide
Through the gray city that stretched up the slope;
And as the slow dusk gathered many came
From far encampments, on some vain pretext,
To pass the green pavilion — long-haired men
That dwelt by the Hydaspes, and the sons
Of the Elymeans, and slim Tartar youths,
And folk that stained their teeth with betel-nut
And wore rough goatskin, herdsmen of the hills;
But saw not Judith, who from common air
Was shut, and none might gaze upon her face.

But when the night fell, and the camps were still,
And nothing moved beneath the icy stars
In their blue bourns, save some tall Kurdish guard
That stalked among the cedars, Judith called
And wakened Marah, and the sentinel

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Drew back, and let them pass beyond the lines
Into the plain; and Judith's heart was full
Seeing the watchfires burning on the towers
Of her own city. As a hundred years
The hours seemed since she stood within its walls,
Her heart so yearned to it. Here on the sand
The two knelt down in prayer, and Marah thought:
"How is it we should come so far to pray?"
Not knowing Judith's cunning that had gained
By this device free passage to and fro
Between the guards. When they had prayed, they rose
And went through the black shadows back to camp.

One cresset twinkled dimly in the tent
Of Holofernes, and Bagoas, his slave,
Lay on a strip of matting at the door,
Drunk with the wine of sleep. Not so his lord
On the soft leopard skin; a fitful sleep
Was his this night, tormented by a dream
That ever waked him. Through the curtained air
A tall and regal figure came and went;
At times a queen's bright diadem pressed down
The bands of perfumed hair, and gold-wrought stuffs
Rustled; at times the apparition stood
Draped only in a woven mist of veils,
Like the king's dancing-girls at Nineveh.

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And once it stole to his couch side, and stooped
And touched his brow with tantalizing lip,
Undoing all the marvel of the dream;
For Holofernes turned then on the couch,
Sleep fled his eyelids, and would come no more.

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BOOK III

THE FLIGHT

On the horizon, as the prow of Dawn
Ploughed through the huddled clouds, a wave of gold
Went surging up the dark, and breaking there
Dashed its red spray against the cliffs and spurs,
But left the valley in deep shadow still.
And still the mist above the Asshur camp
Hung in white folds, and on the pendent boughs
The white dew hung. While yet no bird had moved
A wing in its dim nest, the wakeful prince
Rose from the couch, and wrapped in his long cloak
Stepped over the curved body of the slave,
And thridding moodily the street of tents
Came to the grove of clustered tamarisk trees
Where he had walked and mused the bygone day.
Here on a broken ledge he sat him down,
Soothed by the morning scent of flower and herb

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And the cool vintage of the unbreathed air;
And presently the sleep that night denied
The gray dawn brought him; and he slept and
dreamed.

Before him rose the pinnacles and domes
Of Nineveh; he walked the streets, and heard
The chatter of the merchants in the booths
Pricing their wares, the water-seller's cry,
The flower-girl's laugh — a festival it seemed,
In honor of some conqueror or god,
For cloths of gold and purple tissues hung
From frieze and peristyle, and cymbals clashed,
And the long trumpets sounded: now he breathed
The airs of a great river sweeping down
Past ruined temples and the tombs of kings,
And heard the wash of waves on a vague coast.
Then, in the swift transition of a dream,
He found himself in a damp catacomb
Searching by torchlight for his own carved name
On a sarcophagus; and as he searched
A group of wailing shapes drew slowly near —
The hates and cruel passions of his youth
Become incorporate and immortal things,
With tongue to blazon his eternal guilt;
And on him fell strange terror, who had known
Neither remorse nor terror, and he sprang
Upon his feet, and broke from out the spell,
Clutching his sword-hilt; and before him stood

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Bagoas, the eunuch, bearing on his head
An urn just filled at the clear brook hard by.

Then Holofernes could have struck the slave
Dead in his path — what man had ever seen
The Prince of Asshur tremble? But he turned
Back to the camp, and the slave followed on
At heel, grown sullen also, like a hound
That takes each color of his master's mood.
And when the two had reached the tent, the prince
Halted, and went not in at once, but said:
"Go, fetch me wine, and let my soul make cheer,
For I am sick with visions of the night."

Within the tent alone, he sat and mused:
"What thing is this hath so unstrung my heart
A foolish dream appalls me? what dark spell?
Is it an omen that the end draws nigh?
Such things foretell the doom of fateful men —
Stars, comets, apparitions hint their doom.
The night before my grandsire got his wound
In front of Memphis, and therewith was dead,
He dreamt a lying Ethiop he had slain
Was strangling him; and, later, my own sire
Saw death in a red writing on a leaf.
And I, too" — Here Bagoas brought the wine
And set it by him; but he pushed it back.
"Nay, I 'll not drink it, take away the cup;
And this day let none vex me with affairs,

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For I am ill and troubled in my thought.
Go — no, come hither! these are my commands:
Search thou the camp for choicest flesh and fruit,
And spread to-night a feast in this same tent,
And hang the place with fragrant-smelling boughs
Or such wild flowers as hide in the ravine;
Then bid the Hebrew woman that she come
To banquet with us. As thou lovest life,
Bring her! What matters, when the strong gods call,
Whether they find a man at feast or prayer?"

Bagoas bowed him to his master's foot
With hidden cynic smile, and went his way
To spoil the camp of such poor food as was,
And gather fragrant boughs to dress the tent,
Sprigs of the clove and sprays of lavender;
And meeting Marah with her water jar
At the brookside, delivered his lord's word.
Then Judith sent him answer in this wise:
"O what am I that should gainsay my lord?"
And Holofernes found the answer well.
"Were this not so," he mused, "would not my name
Be as a jest and gibe 'mong womankind?
Maidens would laugh behind their unloosed hair."

"O Marah, see! my lord keeps not his word.
He is as those false jewellers who change
Some rich stone for a poorer, when none looks.

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Three days he promised, and not two are gone!"
Thus Judith said, and smiled, but in her heart:
"O save me, Lord, from this dark cruel prince,
And from mine own self save me; for this man,
A worshipper of fire and senseless stone,
Slayer of babes upon the mother's breast,
He, even he, hath by some conjurer's trick,
Or by his heathen beauty, in me stirred
Such pity as stays anger's lifted hand.
O let not my hand falter, in Thy name!"
And thrice that day, by hazard left alone,
Judith bowed down, upon the broidered mats
Bowed down in shame and wretchedness, and prayed:
"Since Thou hast sent the burden, send the strength!
O Thou who lovest Israel, give me strength
And cunning such as never woman had,
That my deceit may be his stripe and scar,
My kiss his swift destruction. This for thee,
My city, Bethulia, this for thee!"

Now the one star that ruled the night-time then,
Against the deep blue-blackness of the sky
Took shape, and shone; and Judith at the door
Of the pavilion waited for Bagoas;
She stood there lovelier than the night's one star.
But Marah, looking on her, could have wept,
For Marah's soul was troubled, knowing all

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That had been hidden from her till this hour.
The deadly embassy that brought them there,
And the dark moment's peril, now she knew.
But Judith smiled, and whispered, "It is well;"
And later, paling, whispered, "Fail me not!"

Then came Bagoas, and led her to the tent
Of Holofernes, and she entered in
And knelt before him in the cressets' light
Demurely like a slave-girl at the feet
Of her new master, whom she fain would please,
He having paid a helmetful of gold
That day for her upon the market-place,
And would have paid a hundred pieces more.
So Judith knelt; and the dark prince inclined
Above her graciously, and bade her rise
And sit with him on the spread leopard skin.
Yet she would not, but rose, and let her scarf
Drift to her feet, and stood withdrawn a space,
Bright in her jewels; and so stood, and seemed
Like some rich idol that a conqueror,
Sacking a town, finds in a marble niche
And sets among the pillage in his tent.

"Nay, as thou wilt, O fair Samarian!"
Thus Holofernes, "thou art empress here."

"Not queen, not empress would I be, O prince,"
Judith gave answer, "only thy handmaid,

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And one not well content to share her charge."
Then Judith came to his couch side, and said:
"This night, O prince, no other slave than I
Shall wait on thee with meat and fruit and wine,
And bring the scented water for thy hands,
And spread the silvered napkin on thy knee.
So subtle am I, I shall know thy thought
Before thou thinkest, and thy spoken word
Ere thou canst speak it. Let Bagoas go
This night among his people, save he fear
To lose his place and wage, through some one else
More trained and skilful showing his defect!"

Prince Holofernes smiled upon her mirth,
Finding it pleasant. "O Bagoas," he cried,
"Another hath usurped thee. Get thee gone,
Son of the midnight! But stray not from camp,
Lest the lean tiger-whelps should break their fast,
And thou forget I must be waked at dawn."

So when Bagoas had gone into the night,
Judith set forth the viands for the prince;
Upon a stand at the low couch's side
Laid grapes and apricots, and poured the wine,
And while he ate she held the jewelled cup,
Nor failed to fill it to the silver's edge
Each time he drank; and the red vintage seemed
More rich to him because of her light hands

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And the gold bangle that slipped down her wrist.
Now, in the compass of his thirty years
In no one day had he so drank of wine.

The opiate breath of the half-wilted flowers
And the gray smoke that from the cressets curled
Made the air dim and heavy in the tent;
And the prince drowsed, and through the curtained mist,
As in his last night's vision, came and went
The tall and regal figure: now he saw,
Outlined against the light, a naked arm
Bound near the shoulder by a hoop of gold,
And now a sandal flashed, with jewels set.
Through half-shut lids he watched her come and go,
This Jewish queen that was somehow his slave;
And once he leaned to her, and felt her breath
Upon his cheek like a perfumèd air
Blown from a far-off grove of cinnamon;
Then at the touch shrank back, but knew not why,
Moved by some instinct deeper than his sense.
At last all things lost sequence in his mind;
And in a dream he saw her take the lute
And hold it to her bosom while she sang;
And in a dream he listened to the song—
A folklore legend of an ancient king,
The first on earth that ever tasted wine,
Who drank, and from him cast the grief called life

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As 't were a faded mantle. Like a mist
The music drifted from the silvery strings:

"The small green grapes in heavy clusters grew,
Feeding on mystic moonlight and white dew
And amber sunshine, the long summer through;

"Till, with faint tremor in her veins, the Vine
Felt the delicious pulses of the wine;
And the grapes ripened in the year's decline.

"And day by day the Virgins watched their charge;
And when, at last, beyond the horizon's marge,
The harvest-moon drooped beautiful and large,

"The subtle spirit in the grape was caught,
And to the slowly dying monarch brought
In a great cup fantastically wrought.

"Of this he drank; then forthwith from his brain
Went the weird malady, and once again
He walked the palace, free of scar or pain —

"But strangely changed, for somehow he had lost
Body and voice: the courtiers, as he crossed
The royal chambers, whispered — *The King's ghost!*"

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The ceasing of the music broke the drowse,
Half broke the drowse, of the dazed prince, who cried:
"Give me the drink! and thou, take thou the cup!
Fair Judith, 't is a medicine that cures;
Grief will it cure and every ill, save love,"
And as he spoke, he stooped to kiss the hand
That held the chalice; but the cressets swam
In front of him, and all within the tent
Grew strange and blurred, and from the place he sat
He sank, and fell upon the camel-skins,
Supine, inert, bound fast in bands of wine.

And Judith looked on him, and pity crept
Into her bosom. The ignoble sleep
Robbed not his pallid brow of majesty
Nor from the curved lip took away the scorn;
These rested still. Like some Chaldean god
Thrown from its fane, he lay there at her feet.
O broken sword of proof! O prince betrayed!
Her he had trusted, he who trusted none.
The sharp thought pierced her, and her breast was torn,
And half she longed to bid her purpose die,
To stay, to weep, to kneel down at his side
And let her long hair trail upon his face.

Then Judith dared not look upon him more,
Lest she should lose her reason through her eyes;

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And with her palms she covered up her eyes
To shut him out; but from that subtler sight
Within, she could not shut him, and so stood.
Then suddenly there fell upon her ear
The moan of children gathered in the streets,
And throngs of famished women swept her by,
Wringing their wasted hands, and all the woes
Of the doomed city pleaded at her heart.
As if she were within the very walls
These things she heard and saw. With hurried breath
Judith blew out the lights, all lights save one,
And from its nail the heavy falchion took,
And with both hands tight clasped upon the hilt
Thrice smote the Prince of Asshur as he lay,
Thrice on his neck she smote him as he lay,
And from the brawny shoulders rolled the head
Blinking and ghastly in the cresset's light.

Outside stood Marah, waiting, as was planned,
And Judith whispered: "It is done. Do thou!"
Then Marah turned, and went into the tent,
And pulled the hangings down about the corse,
And in her mantle wrapped the brazen head,
And brought it with her. Somewhere a huge gong
With sullen throbs proclaimed the midnight hour
As the two women passed the silent guard;
With measured footstep passed, as if to prayer.
But on the camp's lone edge fear gave them wing,

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And glancing not behind, they fled like wraiths
Through the hushed night into the solemn woods,
Where, from gnarled roots and palsied trees, black shapes
Rose up, and seemed to follow them; and once
Some creature startled in the underbrush
Made cry, and froze the blood about their hearts.
Across the plain, with backward-streaming hair
And death-white face, they fled, until at last
They reached the rocky steep upon whose crest
The gray walls loomed through vapor. This they clomb,
Wild with the pregnant horrors of the night,
And flung themselves against the city gates.

Hushed as the grave lay all the Asshur camp,
Bound in that sleep which seals the eyes at dawn
With double seals, when from the outer waste
An Arab scout rushed on the morning watch
With a strange story of a head that hung,
Newly impaled there, on the city wall.
He had crept close upon it through the fog,
And seen it plainly, set on a long lance
Over the gate — a face with snake-like curls,
That seemed a countenance that he had known
Somewhere, sometime, and now he knew it not,
To give it name; but him it straightway knew,
And turned, and stared with dumb recognizance
Till it was not in mortal man to stay

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Confronting those dead orbs that mimicked life.
On this he fled, and he could swear the thing,
Disjoined by magic from the lance's point,
Came rolling through the stubble at his heel.
Thus ran the Arab's tale; and some that heard
Laughed at the man, and muttered: "O thou fool!"
Others were troubled, and withdrew apart
Upon a knoll that overlooked the town,
Which now loomed dimly out of the thick haze.

Bagoas passing, caught the Arab's words,
Halted a moment, and then hurried on,
Alert to bear these tidings to his lord,
Whom he was bid to waken at that hour;
Last night his lord so bade him. At the tent,
Which stood alone in a small plot of ground,
Bagoas paused, and called: "My lord, awake!
I come to wake thee as thou badest me."
But only silence answered; and again
He called: "My lord, sleep not! the dawn is here,
And stranger matter!" Still no answer came.
Then black Bagoas, smiling in his beard
To think in what soft chains his master lay,
Love's captive, drew the leather screen aside
And marvelled, finding no one in the tent
Save Holofernes buried at full length
In the torn canopy. Bagoas stooped,

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And softly lifting up the damask cloth
Beheld the Prince of Asshur lying dead.

As in some breathless wilderness at night
A leopard, pinioned by a falling tree
That takes him unaware curled up in sleep,
Shrieks, and the ghostly echo in her cave
Mimics the cry in every awful key
And sends it flying through her solitudes:
So shrieked Bagoas, so his cry was caught
And voiced from camp to camp, from peak to peak.
Then a great silence fell upon the camps,
And all the people stood like blocks of stone
In a deserted quarry; then a voice
Blown through a trumpet clamored: *He is dead!*
The Prince is dead! The Hebrew witch hath slain
Prince Holofernes! Fly, Assyrians, fly!

Upon the sounding of that baleful voice
A panic seized the silent multitude.
In white dismay from their strong mountain-hold
They broke, and fled. As when the high snows melt,
And down the steep hill-flanks in torrents flow,
Not in one flood, but in a hundred streams:
So to the four winds spread the Asshur hosts,
Leaving their camels tethered at the stake,
Their brave tents standing, and their scattered arms.

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As the pent whirlwind, breaking from its leash,
Seizes upon the yellow desert sand
And hurls it in dark masses, cloud on cloud,
So from the gates of the embattled town
Leapt armèd men upon the flying foe,
And hemmed them in, now on a river's marge,
Now on the brink of some sheer precipice,
Now in the fens, and pierced them with their spears.
Six days, six nights, at point of those red spears
The cohorts fled; then such as knew not death
Found safety in Damascus, or beyond
Sought refuge, harried only by their fears.

Thus through God's grace, that nerved a gentle hand
Not shaped to wield the deadly blade of war,
The tombs and temples of Judea were saved.
And love and honor waited from that hour
Upon the steps of Judith. And the years
Came to her lightly, dwelling in her house
In her own city; lightly came the years,
Touching the raven tresses with their snow.
Many desired her, but she put them by
With sweet denial: where Manasseh slept
In his strait sepulchre, there slept her heart.
And there beside him, in the barley-field
Nigh unto Dothaim, they buried her.

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